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ABSTRACT

This document presents proceedings of a conference convened to identify the unmet spiritual and other non-material needs of Southeast Asian refugee children and youth and to offer recommendations to strengthen present programs and policies. Participants included leaders in the refugee community, clergy of several faiths, organizational policymakers, service providers, and others in service to refugee children, all of whom were interested in healing the spiritual and mental wounds inflicted by war. The proceedings report consists of five major sections. The first section, "Welcome," includes opening statements and the address of the keynote speaker. The second section, "Perspectives," presents seven speeches reflecting the concerns and viewpoints of parents, foster parents, clergy, Amerasians, and mental health professionals. The third section, "Solution-Oriented Strategies," contains eight presentations dealing with foster care; foster parenthood; summer camp programs; the preservation of religious, spiritual, and cultural heritages; mental health programs; intergenerational programs; and multicultural programs. The fourth section is an extemporaneous summary of the preceding presentations. The fifth section summarizes recommendations for clergy, faith-based communities, parents, foster parents, mental health professionals, resettlement agencies, and agencies serving unaccompanied refugee minors, educators, and youth. A list of presenters and participants is appended. (AF)

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Reasons for Living and Hoping:

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[illegible] Social Needs of Southeast Asian
[illegible] Resettled in the United States

October 16-18, 1986
Washington, D.C.

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This conference was a part of ICCB's continuing effort to serve the non-material needs of refugee children – a major concern of the organization for the past three years.

Reasons for Living and Hoping:

The Spiritual and Psycho-Social Needs of Southeast Asian Refugee Children and Youth Resettled in the United States

> *"The future of humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping."*
>
> –The Church Today

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ICCB, Inc.
New York Secretariat
323 East 47th Street
New York, NY 10017

BICE
General Secretariat
65, rue de Lausanne
1202 Geneva, Switzerland

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Preface

This book presents the formal proceedings of the first international conference sponsored by the New York Secretariat of the International Catholic Child Bureau. The conference, entitled "The Spiritual and Psycho-Social Needs of Southeast Asian Refugee Children and Youth Resettled in the United States", was held October 16-18, 1988 at the Washington Retreat House in Washington, DC. This meeting brought together those people who care for refugee children: leaders of the refugee community, foster parents, refugee youth, clergy of several faiths, service providers, administrators, and mental health professionals.

Perhaps more important than the formal conference presentations were the opportunities for participants to network and share perspectives and insights for solutions.

Some of the conference presentations are reproduced verbatim; other presentations have been edited because of space limitations. The proceedings reflect a diversity of presentation styles. Every effort has been made to preserve each original form.

Introduction

The Refugee Crisis

It is estimated that there are 12 million refugees worldwide, and at least half of these are women and children. Forced from their homelands by persecution, refugees endure tremendous hardships, including treacherous, life-threatening journeys to overcrowded camps. There they often wait for years in the hopes of repatriation in first asylum countries, local resettlement or the final option of third country resettlement.

The Final Option: Resettlement.

Since the mid-1970's, hundreds of thousands of Southeast Asian refugee children and youth have been resettled in the U.S. Many come with families, some come alone to be placed in foster care, and others join older siblings and extended family.

Resettlement of refugees in North America poses a unique set of problems for the newcomers. They are expected to adjust to a new language, different religious traditions, and a social structure in which men, women, children, and the elderly have very different roles than they do in Southeast Asia. Providing basic material support to newly arrived refugees consumes most of the time and budget available to voluntary agencies. Few would dispute the importance of going beyond the material needs in serving refugees, but not all have the time or resources to do so.

Caught between Cultures

Professionals working with refugees are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of focusing on the psycho-social development and the cultural, spiritual, and religious heritage of refugee children and youth. Such attention recognizes the role that the culture of origin has for the spiritual development of children and youth. At the same time, it recognizes the difficulties of reconciling this background with the demands of adjustment in a society with different norms and values. It is most often children and youth who are in direct confrontation with these two worlds.

To Instill a Sense of Hope

The New York Secretariat of the ICCB convened a conference on the spiritual needs of Southeast Asian refugee children for leaders in the refugee community, clergy of several faiths, organizational policy makers, service providers, and others in service to refugee children. The main purpose of the conference was to identify the unmet spiritual and other nonmaterial needs of these refugees and offer recommendations to strengthen present programs and policies. All of the participants were interested in healing the spiritual and mental wounds inflicted by war. Foremost on everyone's mind was how to instill a sense of hope among newly resettled children so that they will be able to lead fulfilling lives in the U.S.

ICCB's Global Initiatives for Refugee Children

Global Survey

The October 1988 conference had its origins in a global survey conducted by the General Secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland.

In 1985, the ICCB conducted a global survey of service providers in refugee camps and countries of resettlement. The aim of the survey was to provide an assessment of concerns expressed by refugees about the spiritual and nonmaterial aspects of their lives. Their concerns included the following:

- The new culture did not reinforce traditional beliefs, customs and values;

- The new culture caused inter-generational and family conflict;
- The refugees experienced a loss of community, particularly in religious, cultural, and recreational activities;
- Non-Christian refugees experienced distress at the lack of facilities and inappropriateness of the socio-cultural context for religious practices;
- There were a few concerns related to the proselytism of certain churches offering incentives for people to join;
- Young people keenly experienced the conflict between cultures and desired ethnic, recreational, and social activities as a means of support;
- The unaccompanied refugee minors felt the loss of the family support system and had a sense of repressing or rejecting their refugee experience in an attempt to adjust better to the new situation.

Programs in Refugee Camps

There is an on-going program directed from the Geneva Secretariat investigating the effects of the refugee experience, and confinement in refugee camps, on the child's overall psycho-social development.

Kampuchean mother and child at the Sa Kaeo holding camp in Prachin Buri, Thailand, 60 km west of the Thai-Kampuchean border.

"What does the refugee child have to lose? Those very things which give us hope to continue, reasons for believing in ourselves, and the qualities that allow us to experience joy, tenderness, security and a belief in the future."

– Jan Williamson, REFUGEES, June 1988 (UNHCR)

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WELCOME

☐ Opening Comments

Stefan Vanistendael
Deputy Secretary General
The International Catholic Child Bureau
General Secretariat
Geneva, Switzerland

A few years ago, the UNHCR organized a conference in Geneva on refugee issues which I attended as an observer for the International Catholic Child Bureau (ICCB). At that time ICCB did not have any refugee programs, but we wanted to know if there were "spiritual problems of refugee children". We did not have any pre-set answer to this question, but we wanted to find out.

During a morning coffee break at the conference, I asked a representative of a German charity if she knew of spiritual problems of refugee children. This representative was a small woman with black hair and big bright eyes. For a moment she gazed at me over the coffee, and then she said slowly, "Finally, someone talks about it. Of course there are such problems." This was the start of an amazing conversation. It began at about 10:30 a.m., we missed part of the main conference, and we were still absorbed in a profound exchange at 3 p.m.

This representative knew more about the suffering of refugees than many well-trained and well-intentioned people. Although German, she had lived a long time in Vietnam and she spoke Vietnamese fluently. She knew the differences in communication between a Western society and a Vietnamese society.

And she knew the incredible suffering of many Vietnamese refugees resettled in Germany, a suffering often hidden behind a smile.

That is how ICCB was first alerted to the issue of the psychological and spiritual needs of refugees and refugee children. Since that first informal meeting during a coffee break in Geneva, ICCB has come a long way. I am not giving you all the details of the long road we have travelled from that meeting until our present activities in the area of refugees, such as this conference.

I don't need to say how important we think this conference is. ICCB headquarters in Geneva has sent two out of its five executive staff to this conference. If you like a little joke, that is 40% of headquarters staff. It shows how important this conference is to us. But it will depend now on the goodwill, the generosity, and the cooperation of all of us to make this a great working party which will bear fruit for the refugees.

Not only ICCB is very involved in the issue of refugee children; I feel personally very much involved. I grew up in Belgium, a small country which has suffered immensely from the rivalries of other big countries. Is that not a pattern which many refugees will recognize? My two brothers, my sister, and myself constitute the first generation in my father's family who are not refugees. As far as we can look back into the 19th century, my father's family has been a string of generations of refugees. My father was the last one – I hope! – because he fled in the Second World War. I am extremely grateful for this new privilege in my family: not being a refugee. But although I did not suffer as a refugee myself, I cannot forget the pain, the anxiety, the sense of loss of my father, my grandfather and my ancestors.

Spiritual Needs of Refugee Children

We are here to discuss the spiritual needs of refugee children. Precisely, refugees remind us of some precious spiritual values. They were forced to leave their homes. They were forced to draw on their inner spiritual resources for mere survival. We can certainly learn a lot from them. By knocking on our door, they tell us: "This earth is not your planet, not my planet; it is our planet; we must share it." By knocking on our door they also remind us that no spiritual growth is possible unless, at some point in our life, we leave behind what is precious to us, so as to gain some new freedom.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that refugees have played such a major role in the religious tradition. A good part of the Old Testament is the history of refugees, and Jesus started his life as a refugee child in Egypt. If we really want to grow spiritually, we may have to become at some point refugees in the spiritual sense, and to leave some of our wealth and some of what is familiar to us behind. It is good to take care of the spiritual growth of refugee children. It may make them grow, and it may make us grow.

As you can see, we have many reasons to make a success out of this conference. Let us not disappoint the expectations of the refugees themselves. As an old Flemish proverb says: "Let us do our best, God does the rest."

☐ Opening Comments

Monsignor Nicholas DiMarzio
Executive Director
Migration and Refugee Service
U.S. Catholic Conference
Washington, DC

It is a pleasure to be here today because our topic is so important. As we look at the phenomenon of refugee production in this world today, we realize that there are many victims. The victims differ according to age and class. The results last for shorter or longer periods of time. The adult refugees do suffer. They suffer not only what they experience themselves, but they suffer most of all because they see the suffering of their children. Their suffering perhaps will not last as long because they are older, but for their children there is a lifetime of traumatic experience that they have to live through.

Yes, children are resilient, children can bounce back; we know that and thank God they can. Yet it is so difficult for them at times to overcome the trauma of being a refugee. The physical conditions change; the health conditions get better. *But it is that spiritual jolting at times that will take a lifetime for them to overcome, unless there is some intervention close to the source of the time of that traumatic experience of having been wrenched from what they knew, to find a life of uncertainty for a certain period of time, and then the final settlement.*

Spiritual Needs of Refugees in the U.S.

What can be done to meet the spiritual needs of refugee children? Now, those spiritual needs are probably of two kinds. They are strictly spiritual in the sense of religious, and yet there are the other non-material needs that are also spiritual that have to be addressed, and I think the next two days of the conference will address many of these needs. I will leave that for the other participants to address.

We are happy at the Migration and Refugee Service that this conference is happening. We have participated in the planning process, and over the last several years we have also participated in a survey to get to the point of this conference. In late 1985, the Migration and Refugee Service sent out to its affiliate diocese a ICCB survey that pinpointed the spiritual needs of refugee children. This was a worldwide survey that ICCB had engaged in, and I think that the U.S. was probably the best at responding and has a lot of feeling about these needs:

- There was a need for culturally-sensitive religious practices in the host countries;
- There was a lack of appropriate facilities mentioned to practice religion, especially for the Buddhists and Moslem children;
- It was noted that there was a lack of priests and religious who speak the refugee's language;

- There was noted the inappropriate proselytizing by some religious groups;
- There was an expressed need for programs on the maintenance of the children's native cultures and languages;
- There was an expressed need to address the trauma experienced by the children who have been separated from families.

Unaccompanied Refugee Minors: A Specific Concern

My own experience has been in the unaccompanied minors program, where we were dealing with children who were separated from their families, some older and some younger. That program taught me what we were dealing with, and it was a difficult problem certainly, to take the place of a child's family. Who can really do that? How can it be done? Only another family can attempt that tremendous task. We as concerned people from the agency's perspectives need to take that child's circumstance seriously and do all we can to bolster the support of refugee children.

A Holistic Approach to Refugee Resettlement

In the last year we have amalgamated the three divisions of Migration and Refugee Service: one for refugees, another for immigrants, and a third for pastoral care of refugees and immigrants. We are taking a holistic approach to refugee resettlement and refugee care, and we cannot forget that spiritual element.

Vietnamese refugee at government dock in Kowloon, Hong Kong.

☐ Keynote Speaker

Khamchong Luangpraseut
Supervisor
Indochinese Programs
Santa Ana Unified School District
Santa Ana, California

I feel honored to be here with you to participate in this— I should say—historical event. Thank you so much for inviting me. I feel very humble sitting next to Monsignor DiMarzio and the Venerable Uparatana from Sri Lanka. I would like to tell you how delighted I am, as a speaker, to witness something very great. A conference like this is long overdue. I think that this is really the starting point, the birth of a step that will lead to a great movement in this country. As Monsignor DiMarzio has said, we must have a holistic approach to refugee issues. I would like to commend the International Catholic Child Bureau, which is leading us towards this kingdom, a very royal kingdom: the kingdom of spiritual and non-material needs.

This not a topic which is very popular in the United States of America. I can list three reasons why:

- First, it is clearly defined in the U.S. constitution that there is a clear separation between church and state;
- Second, the spiritual needs of refugees are a low priority in most resettlement policies;
- Third, this is a post-industrialist society which places constant emphasis on materialistic wealth as an acceptable, if not a unique, measure of success in life. To put it simply: you are defined by what you own .

This is not a problem only in this country. I also feel that this is not an easy subject to talk about in Indochina. I can list three reasons for this:

- First, it seems to me that in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, adults have always been viewed and treated as more important than children;

- Second, I do not think that our Indochinese children are very well defined as a group in our traditional society in relation to religious activities, thinking or practices;
- Third, children are not a preferred subject among academic interests, at least among scholars whom I know from Indochinese countries.

So then the question is: Who are these Indochinese children? How can we address their needs – particularly their spiritual and non-material needs? You know that "assessment" is an important word. Unless we know what their critical needs are, we can hardly say with confidence that this is what the children at risk really need.

Assessments

Perhaps I should start with a few anecdotes about how people assess one another in particular situations. The first assessment is called "the American soap no good!" In the 1950's, many packages were sent to Laos from the United States as a form of humanitarian assistance. Many other countries have received and continue to receive boxes with the four letters "C.A.R.E." written on the side. One day while unpacking one of the boxes, we saw many items. Some were familiar to us, like sugar and cookies. But to our surprise, there was something mysterious in the box as well. We had no idea what it was. It came in a block and had a yellowish color. Since we had been with the French administration for sometime, we had the idea that the mysterious item could be a piece of soap. We took it and went to the river to do laundry. After a few seconds it was obvious: the American soap no good! Do you know what it was? It was a block of yellow cheese!

The early American assessment of the Indochinese people was that Cambodians, Laotians and Vietnamese did not have enough dairy products in their diet. So the good Americans sent us the needed cheese. The truth of the matter is that we do not eat cheese. Our cows are dry and there is no fresh milk. The only milk we have in the market comes from Switzerland, and that is condensed milk. The only fresh milk is from our mothers.

The second "assessment" came from my own grandmother, Khampha Luangpraseut, before I lost her. She was then about seventy years old. One day we invited her to see a soccer game in my junior high school. She was sitting in the hot sun with the rest of my family. After watching the game for 20 minutes, I saw her very worried, tenderly worried. She turned to my father and asked, "Son, how much does that little round thing cost?" My father said that the ball was not too expensive. "Oh good, she remarked. Why don't you buy them each a ball so they don't have to run around and chase the same ball?"

There is another great "assessment". This one came from Shanghai in about 1927. There was still an important colony of British subjects in China. The British always had their beautiful tennis courts wherever they went. One day two traditional Confucian Chinese were passing by. They were amazed by what they saw. They could not understand how those two white people who appeared to them as quite wealthy (they had new shoes, clean shorts and shirts) had to work so hard. One Chinese said to the other, "Don't you think these people have enough money? Why don't they hire someone to labor for them?"

These anecdotes have just given us a hint about how easily we can make mistakes in judging people's motivations without knowing too much about their identities. When you change the country, you change the culture, and everything might as well be totally different.

The Indochinese: A Background

Now, on a more serious note, who are these people: the Cham, the Hmong, the Iu-Mien, the Khmer, the Khmu, the Lahu, the Lao, the Vietnamese or the Amerasian children? I wish we had plenty of time and plenty of patience so that we could have a closer look into the individual family structure, customs, system of education, communication and various value systems. I also wish we could spend time analyzing the

Indochinese refugees' personal experience in the United States of America. Nevertheless, I would like to share a few things. These few issues are deep in my heart, and I hope they can help you to better understand the social and cultural backgrounds of our Indochinese youngsters and their families.

As a term, Indochina came from a combination of two great countries: India and China. The person who came up with this idea was not born in Indochina but Denmark. He was a member of a Danish family of geographers in the mid-nineteenth century. The land between India and China has become Indochina. Now we can jokingly call the United States of America "Mexinada" from the south or "Canaxico" from the north, right?

India has a very clear direction of development. Literature, philosophy and religion have always been major areas of a most serious interest in India. Mahabharata and Ramayana, the monumental epics of Hindu literature can serve us as a testimony to that effect. India is also well-known as the birthplace of many religions and worldly philosophies. China, on the other hand, has concentrated its high attention on administration, ethics and education. One can hardly talk about education, seriously, without mentioning the tremendous teacher of ten thousand generations, Confucius.

The five Olympic rings can help to illustrate, par excellence, the five Indochinese countries. Vietnam and Cambodia are to the very east; Burma and Thailand are on the western side; and Laos, a landlocked country, is right in the middle. As a matter of historical development, out of the five Indochinese countries, only Vietnam is culturally linked to China. The other four countries lean towards India and Sri Lanka.

For practical reasons, my talk will only include the Laotians, Vietnamese and Cambodians, not the Thai or Burmese. The main factors in Cambodia and Laos which have helped to form our philosophical mind have a lot to do with Brahmanism, Theravada, Buddhism and Animism. The implication here is that most of the Cambodian and Laotian people believe in the theory of reincarnation. Yes, we respect polytheism. Yes, there is some unspecified category of caste systems still going on. We believe in Arahat; we believe we are on our way to Nirvana. In general, people coming from India-bound Indochina do have a tendency to see human beings as an instance in this impersonal universe. Humans are not and could not be equal by the theory of reincarnation. For example, if we all have come to this present life, and each one with his or her own karmic luggage from the previous lives, how could we be equal to one another in the absolute sense? If karma is understood as deeds or the sum of all consequences of mental or physical actions, then as human beings we will try to have virtues. The virtues, in this context, are only perceived as necessary conditions for the next rebirth into a hopefully higher place. Therefore, we are tolerant and we may worship many gods and many supernatural powers at different localities, at different temples and pagodas at the same time.

Cambodians and Laotians tend to be individualistic. The Lao, in particular, may value, in many cases, their individual freedom over the freedom of their families. We know that our world is imperfect; therefore we are not resisting change. In fact, Buddha has pointed out long ago that "only change is permanent." If we are not resisting change per se, we are somewhat slower in assimilating ourselves into radically different situations. It seems to me that it usually takes us a much longer period of time to understand new ideas or get used to a new place.

Now we will switch to Vietnam, which is from the other cultural side of Indochina, the China-bound Indochina. The guiding factors in Vietnam are definitely different from those in Laos and Cambodia. Confucianism, Taoism, Mahayana Buddhism, the cult of ancestors and, to a lesser extent, Animism and Christianity are the major components of the Vietnamese cultural heritage. The implication of all these factors is very profound. The overall emphasis is on the moral perfection in society. We are talking here about social order, harmony with nature and the centralized state. The Vietnamese Buddhists also believe that they are heading towards Nirvana. They are Mahayanists. They believe in Bhothisatpha. The people who have been inspired by this China-bound philosophy of life are very family-oriented. They value education highly and have a great deal of respect for everyone with academic backgrounds. They are also at ease with a centralized administration. Bureaucracies are well known to them. They are well-disciplined, but they are also rather formal in their relationships with other people. They have a very strong sense of national identity. They tend to resist change at first; however, once assimilated, they progress rapidly in their new role and environment.

Vietnamese Traditional Family Unit

Let us have a closer look at some of the issues I have just mentioned. First, I would like to bring you through a Vietnamese structure in a traditional family unit. "Traditional" means the period from one thousand years ago until the 1930's in Vietnam.

If you were a child born into a Vietnamese family, you would be taught that when you grow up, you will be a contributor to the family common treasury. You are an integral part of that family. As a son, you must accept the role of the future bearer of the family name. It is extremely important to understand the full meaning of being a Vietnamese son. The function of a son in the Vietnamese family is a lifelong commitment for support and comfort to the parents. This is the case where a person has been considered as an important member of the family from the day he was born.

If you were born a daughter, you would be taught differently. A Vietnamese daughter must remember that she is a female and not a male. Her function as a sister is to help take care of her brothers so they can help to take care of the family. As time goes on, the younger daughter will assume the role of a future wife and mother. The only certain destiny of a Vietnamese woman is as a future daughter-in-law. Vietnamese women become the lifelong members of their husband's families and not their own.

Vietnamese children are taught moral values at an early age. They learn these values in and outside of their home. At least once a year, the entire family takes a trip to the cemetery to visit the tombs of their ancestors. All family members take part in cleaning the tombs and then communicate with their ancestors to convey their respect and gratitude through elaborate ceremonies. At home, many families still have an altar to reflect this important cult of ancestors. It does not matter which religious faith one is affiliated with.

At home again, this time at the dining table, Vietnamese children learn a great deal of the Vietnamese value system. They learn the respectful status of their grandparents and their parents within their nuclear family unit. Before they can begin eating, Vietnamese children will address, in a very respectful manner, their grandparents, their father and their mother to invite them to eat first.

At school there is a special curriculum to help children understand and respect the importance of their family system. It is called moral and civic education. The Vietnamese school system has incorporated two to three hours weekly of moral and civic education in their lesson plan to teach Vietnamese children from day one of their schooling. Let me go through the first grade curriculum on the issue of Vietnamese moral education as subject matter. This is one, duty towards grandparents, and two, duty towards parents and siblings. In the second grade curriculum, the moral education focuses on pupils at home. This is to prepare the child to understand and accept the home environment. At the third grade level, the moral emphasis is the strongest. Teachers address in concrete terms how children should behave and perform if their parents are becoming ill and physically weaker, if their parents cannot work or function as they have been able to do, and if their parents are getting older. At the fourth grade level, the emphasis is on the overall respect for the family spirit.

The father is an important person in the Vietnamese family. The Vietnamese father is viewed as the leader of the whole system of many households. The function of the leader is to provide security and growth for the entire family system. The Vietnamese father, not the husband, is given many important tasks to fulfill. The Vietnamese regard the husband and wife relationship as a strictly private matter. The father officially represents the family in all circumstances. He presides over all family rites and ancestral worship ceremonies.

The Vietnamese female child has a different story to tell. She will grow up to be a mother. The Vietnamese mother plays a secondary role in the traditional Vietnamese family structure. The most important function of the Vietnamese mother is the function of manager; she must have managerial skills. She is in charge of all business at home. In most cases, there are three or four generations living in the same household. The task of traditional Vietnamese women is to keep harmony within the family. She coordinates the household and helps others when necessary. I can say without too much exaggeration that in every Vietnamese home there is a potential minister of interior. The traditional rationale for not giving the mother the role of representing the family, although she works as hard as the Vietnamese father, is that she came from another family which has already been represented by her own father.

There are two concepts of the Vietnamese family. One is *Gia Dinh*, the family in its entire structure. The second is *Nha*, the household. The *Gia Dinh* is made of many *Nha*. When you are the leader, you are the leader of all these households. A Vietnamese man is born into his family. He will belong to it forever. A Vietnamese woman is married into the family of her husband.

In a sense, we can clearly see that the Vietnamese child is a child of his or her parents. We can also view the history of the Vietnamese as a sequence of families. That is to say, this family came from the previous one, the previous family came from the family before it and after this present family, other families will follow this horizontal path of societal development. It is a succession of family by family and goes on endlessly. The concept of the Vietnamese horizontal path of development entails a number of implications for the upbringing of Vietnamese youngsters. The Vietnamese child, in this model, is strongly connected with his or her parents. The youngster gets direct support and systematic instructions from parents. The parents are the product of Vietnamese history, tradition, philosophy and religions. The Vietnamese educators have a tremendous role to play with regard to the upbringing of Vietnamese youngsters. The family and school will exert an extraordinary influence on Vietnamese children during their entire formative years. Educators and parents are inspired by their own culture and history. They do everything they can for their children to become secured members of Vietnamese society.

What does it mean to become a secured person? The secured person is a reflection of all the Vietnamese history, tradition, philosophy and religious thinking. That secured person, in concrete terms, means to become a prosperous person. Prosperity seems to be the aim of the Vietnamese society at large. I do not mean prosperity in the materialistic term alone but rather in its holistic term: the security and growth of the family system.

The Lao Way of Life

The Lao way of life greatly differs from the Vietnamese. If the Vietnamese is viewed as conservative, the Lao would be more liberal in comparison. The Lao are born with the belief that they are here because of their karma. Even to be born Lao is due to their karma. The Lao believe in Nirvana and are guided by Theravadin Buddhist concept of life on earth. The Lao greatly enjoy the "boon", a festivity with singing, eating and dancing.

The Lao child, contrary to the Vietnamese child, is not the child of his parents alone. He will follow his path of reincarnation. He understands that he is the child of a particular family, but only within this lifetime. The Lao does not perceive himself or herself as going from family to family, horizontally as the Vietnamese do. The Lao travels from life to life until he reaches Nirvana.

Let me take you to a Lao village, which typically consists of less than 50 houses. In any Lao village you will see children of both gender playing together. Lao kids have a lot of freedom. There is no social separation between boys and girls. There is no running water in our homes, and there is no electricity or gas in our village. The lack of these facilities provides numerous opportunities for Lao young females and males to be together. The nearby rivers and forests are the integral part of the Lao courtship traditions. The Lao males and females tease and talk about love and intimate subjects to each other. Courtship is part of growing up in the Lao culture.

Let us say that two people have a mutual interest in each other which would lead to their marriage. It is very important to note that the Lao youngsters are the ones who have made their decision to become husband and wife, without the interference of their parents. They must choose their own partner. In most cases, the Lao marriage could not be arranged. The parents are informed and asked to help only after the decision has been reached by the youngsters themselves (You see they need technical assistance!). And finally there is a very beautiful wedding ceremony. Partly Buddhist, I presume, partly Brahmanist, the Baci ceremony is a great spiritual and social event. The Lao think in popular terms that the person you actually see represents only one part, the physical. The other dimension, which is invisible, represents 32 souls which can affect the physical and mental welfare of that person. To keep a person healthy, the Lao must perform the Baci ceremony occasionally to invite the souls to come back and continue to inhabit the body. During the wedding ceremony, two towers of flowers are standing and facing the future couple. Each tower represents one set of the 32 individual souls. The Lao wedding indicates not only the union of two bodies but the two sets of souls, as well.

Four nights after the wedding, the Lao couple lights candles in a corner of their bedroom. Before going to bed, they kneel down and say a few silent prayers. They are actually sending a message to invite a soul in the cosmos to be born into their family. The message basically says, "Satu, Satu, please come and join our family and bring with you joy and peace so we can make it through this life together in our journey toward Nirvana, Satu, Satu." In doing so, the Lao are seeking to increase and diversify their religious merits by teaming up with others. If the couple conceive a child, they will say that the invitation has been accepted. Therefore, when children are born, it is not a delivery of the body alone; it is the personification of a particular set of souls. This is one of the reasons why we do not see the Lao parents intervening in the affairs of their offspring directly. The Lao parents believe that their child is an individual who has been born with the whole history intact. The body is small because it has to go through a "special gate" which we call biology. The spiritual entity is intact within that small body.

After the marriage, the Lao husband will leave his own home and go to live with his wife and the parents-in-law for two to three years. This period is most educational for our young Lao man. For the first time in his life, the young male will have a chance to study, understand and reflect on the Lao culture. He will understand people better, the people who were born outside of his own family. The father-in-law accompanies his son-in-law to the rice field for a lengthy period of time. Many meaningful conversations take place between the two men. This is one of the Lao ways of transferring job skills and social manners to a younger person.

The first, and sometimes even the second, child will be born in the in-laws' house. Grandparents adore grandchildren in all cultures. However, in the Lao culture, these grandchildren will play an exceptional role in cementing the good relationship between the Lao husband's and wife's respective families. Because, after two or three years of staying with the in-laws, the young couple moves back to the husband's community. There is another option. If the couple wishes to have their independence and to maintain a balanced physical distance between their parents' villages, they can also establish their new home somewhere between the two communities. It is interesting to note that the Lao culture, in this particular aspect, is unique because both sides of the families are equally important.

Contrary to the Vietnamese pattern, the Lao children have a loose relationship with their parents. Lao children can say "no" to their parents quite frankly. Lao parents do not teach their children directly. They prefer to have the Buddhists monks educate their children. The pagoda, a Buddhist temple, is very critical to the overall growth of Lao children. The Buddhist monks, when qualified, are extremely efficient in providing valuable guidance to the young people. They are the ones who design the morality path for the children to follow. This educational aspect of the pagoda is very important to understand. Laos did not have a secular school until the French came. The first secular school in Laos was established in 1907 and was open to accommodate a few Lao adults whom the French rulers had expected to become interpreters.

The Lao wish their child to become a better person. The term "better" here means to be happy. It is almost happiness versus prosperity as a concept when compared with the Vietnamese value system. "Happy" means two things: to have peace with oneself and harmony with others. The Lao try to avoid having enemies. If the Lao have only one enemy, they tend to sincerely hope that the enemy does not have a permanent character so that he or she can become more understanding as time goes by. If someone does not like me today, as a Lao I say, "Bo Pen Ngang", meaning it is okay. I still hope that when tomorrow comes it will be otherwise.

The Trauma of the Indochinese Refugees

Now let us leave the Lao and the Vietnamese for a while in their own peaceful setting. Let us have a look at the issue which Monsignor DiMarzio has so eloquently talked about in his earlier speech: the trauma of the Indochinese refugee population.

The Vietnamese

I am aware that you know a great deal about the suffering of the Indochinese refugee population. In 1975, many of you had a chance to witness on television the thousands of Vietnamese refugees fleeing south. People tried to carry their belongings with them, but they had to discard them as the journey became longer and more difficult. Finally, they reached Saigon, the capital city of the Republic of Vietnam. You probably saw the refugees trying to storm the American Embassy, not for the purpose of destroying it, but to get through the gates to freedom. The refugees who found themselves in the U.S. Embassy compound were the lucky ones because the American helicopters evacuated them, and soon they would be on U.S. ships heading for American territories. Maybe you still remember that young Vietnamese officer, well-dressed in that light blue uniform. He gave an interview about the ongoing situation in South Vietnam which was devastating to him and gave no hope for the Vietnamese people to improve their life under the Communist regime. He then stepped back, took out a loaded pistol and shot himself in front of a group of foreign journalists. Still, that picture is not the most important to illustrate human desperation. The picture which will remain in my memory forever is the picture of the young mother, in her early twenties, who could not get through the gate of the American Embassy compound but was trying to hand her newborn baby over the fence to anyone out there on the other side, the lucky side of the fence. *It is the most eloquent gesture of a human being, one who can detach oneself from one's own child so the hope can live on.*

The Vietnamese refugees tried to leave their country as the situation worsened. They were not wrong. The Communist regime is really different than what many Americans perceive it to be. It is very important to understand the true nature of Communism. Communism is not an intellectual exercise. It has deprived millions of human beings already of so many things in their daily lives. The Vietnamese took the lead in escaping Communism in Indochina. It is difficult for the Vietnamese to flee across Cambodia or Laos. Both countries have become a neo-colony of the Vietnamese Communist regime since 1975. Therefore, the only escape left to the Vietnamese is to go across the South China Sea. That is how the concept of the so-called "boat people" came into being. The words "boat people" evoke a bad sensation every time I hear them. I have spoken with many boat people, and this is the essence of their tragic story. After 1975, the Vietnamese could not just go out, purchase a boat and flee. They had to prepare for their escape very carefully. In some cases, it took more than one year or two to get out of Vietnam. They had to split their families. A typical Vietnamese family has five children. In most cases, the father would lead the planned escape. He would take up to three children with them. He would promise his wife and other kids that he would be back as soon as possible or would do everything he could to get them out of Vietnam. "If I can make it to the other shore," says the father to the mother, "I will get you out of here." This message is a lifetime commitment for many Vietnamese refugees. This is also one of the main reasons why so many Vietnamese in the U.S. are so eager to have two or three jobs at a time. They really want to get their loved ones out of Communist Vietnam. "But even if I cannot make it to the other shore," continues the father, "Because of the high sea and our relatively small boat, or pirates, you must know what to do. Even if I have to die with these kids, don't give up.

Vietnamese refugees bidding farewell to others leaving Pulan Bidong refugee camp for transit camp in Malyasia.

Just wait. When a better time comes to flee, you must take the rest of our children and get out of this place." This is the reason why we are witnessing the continuous movement of Vietnamese citizens out of their country. A Vietnamese saying goes: "If only the lamp posts could walk, they would get out of Vietnam, too."

The Amerasians

We also know about the special category of young people: the non-accompanied minors, the Amerasians. It is very important to understand this category of young people. The Amerasians were abandoned twice before their departure to the U.S.: first, just before the end of the Vietnam War, the Amerasian youngsters were abandoned by their American fathers who had to leave Vietnam once their military mission was over.; then the Amerasian children were abandoned by their own mothers when the situation became harder under the Communist regime. These young people were often left to the streets. They were referred to as "the dust of society" and were not welcome in the schools.

After many years of hesitation, the U.S. government finally recognized the Amerasians as the legal offspring of Americans. Entry visas were issued to the Amerasians, and many have started to arrive in the U.S. At the same time, many of the mothers who never cared for their Amerasian children started to re-establish the mother-child relations, not out of a genuine love for the child but out of their own selfish interest to get out of Vietnam. The sentence "I love you" was maybe heard by many Amerasians for the first time in the last thirteen years, during which time they have developed a strong resistance, due to their bitter experience, to trusting people. In consequence, no matter how good we are and how sincere our help is, the Amerasian will think that we might have something else inside our heads. They thought we gave them something because we wanted something else in return.

So, we, the educators, social service providers and religious leaders have to work harder with this category of young people. I personally supervise the Indochinese Programs in

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the Santa Ana Unified School District, in Southern California. Many of our Instructional Assistants and community workers have been assigned to look after Amerasian students. We have observed that they are great kids with tremendous life experience. Once they understand who they are and what is expected of them in this country of their fathers, they are able to function and come back to the society.

The Cambodians

Now a few words about my Cambodian friends. The trauma they had to go through in their life after 1975 is hard to describe. I have spent eleven of my adult years in Poland. I have visited Oswiecim many times. Oswiecim is the Polish word for Auschwitz, where some millions of inmates, mostly Jews, were murdered during the Second World War. Every time I talk about it, I see tons and tons of kids' spectacles. I still see wagons of human hairs which the Nazi scientists have transformed into textiles. The human fat was also transformed into soap. All this is still there for visitors to see in Oswiecim.

The Cambodians cannot even cry about their experiences. It is stuck there and cannot come out of their chests, because of what one Khmer did to another Khmer. In only three years, from 1975 to 1978, millions of people in a country of eight million were killed. Some of the Khmer scholars took the pain to analyze the human loss by profession. I was told that there were two hundred writers registered in Cambodia in 1975. By 1978, after 3 years of the Khmer Rouge regime, only four of those writers were left. In Communist Cambodia under Pol Pot, every single Cambodian who got caught and indicated that he or she had more than 4 years of public instruction under the precious political regime was sentenced to death. Four years of education is too intellectual for the Khmer Rouge leadership. That is what has happened to Cambodians.

How many of you have seen "The Killing Fields"? If you haven't seen it, please check it out. In that film there is a moment I would like to you to focus on. After an agitation session by a communist agent, there was a little boy who stood up and walked to the chalkboard on which there were five figures representing two adults – father and mother – and three kids holding hands. The first thing that little boy did was to take a chalk and cross the father and mother out of the picture. Then, with that little innocent finger of his, *the boy erased the mother's hand to interrupt the linkage between the kids and their parents.* You must know also that during the Pol Pot regime, children were taken away from their family and placed under a special program. Can you feel now what was going on in a Cambodian family under those circumstances? Many of our Cambodian families here are like that family in "The Killing Fields". Many, too many, Cambodian families today are headed by single parents, female parents. There is a lot of misunderstanding going on between kids and parents in our Cambodian family situation. Children who have grown up under the Pol Pot regime are indoctrinated by the Khmer Rouge cadre to hate, distrust and condemn their own parents.

The Laotians

Now, just a few words about my Hmong brothers and sisters from Laos. In general, the Laotian refugees have not suffered as much as their Cambodian or Vietnamese counterparts. But there is one category of Laotians, the Hmong people, who have suffered a great deal during the same period. The Hmong people were numbered at about 400,000 in Laos at the beginning of the Vietnam War period.

During that short period of war, the Hmong have lost about ten percent of their population. That is 40,000 people. At one time they tried to escape the Laotian Communist regime by attempting to cross the mighty Mekong River during the daytime. You know what happened? Many Hmong did not know how to swim, because they were born in the high mountains where there are no big rivers. The Hmong are always ingenious. In order to swim across the Mekong River, which, even during the dry season, is a very wide and fast-flowing river, they bought plastic bags, blew them up, put them under their armpits and started to swim across the Mekong to Thailand. Unfortunately, the Communist soldiers were there, and they started to shoot at these Hmong refugees. Hmong children, women and men died. Their corpses were floating over the Mekong in 1976. Many people witnessed that tragedy. That is one part of a Hmong's life that may never be forgotten.

My own life's story, although very painful, is no match to their stories. I do not even dare to compare. On one particular day in 1961 during the month of February, I had lunch with my father and my mother in the village. I had not seen them for months because of the civil war that was going on in Laos. I had lunch at noon and by one o'clock, I became an orphan. Both of my parents, along with two other cousins, were shot. I was the only one child in the family. I was exactly twenty years old. I know the meaning of the loss of the loved ones, in personal terms.

Some twenty years later, I held a considerable position with the Laotian Government as Director of Administrative Affairs at the Ministry of Information. One afternoon, in May 1975, I had a brief conversation with a foreign diplomat who knew the Laotian Communists well. I had only two hours after that conversation to get ready to leave Vientiane, the capital city of Laos. I have two children; my son was just a born a year ago, and my daughter was only seven. My wife is from Poland. We had to leave everything behind in two hours and get out. This is a part of being a refugee.

The next step is when a refugee goes to the camps in the first country of asylum. You know; you are better informed than I am. I was lucky; I did not have to stay in the camps. After a short stay in Thailand, I went to France and concentrated on studying the Indochinese refugee's resettlement patterns over there. I had a strong belief that the Laotian people would not do well in France. Maybe I was wrong, but it was a strong sentiment I had then.

Let us go back to the camps for a while. I was told that life in the camps in Thailand was not easy, especially during the first years. I hope somebody here who has visited Thai camps and other camps will share what they know about the life experiences of the Indochinese refugees in those first asylum countries. There must be a lot of good, as well as bad, things going in those camps.

Adjusting to a New Home

The next trauma is of very different nature. It has to do with the necessary readjustment to a new place in the third country, which one day will eventually be called home by refugees themselves. When they first arrived in the U.S., the refugees would see many changes occurring to their daily lives. The first major changes are the changes of attitude and social status among their family members. If you still remember a little bit of what I said earlier about the Vietnamese structure in a traditional family, and if you live in the U.S. for just a few months, you see one person in the family who has changed drastically. That is the woman. Yes, the status of our women has changed. When that happens in the refugee family, it certainly entails a changing relationship between the husband and wife in the family. We do not know for sure at this point how much those changes have affected the educational, social and mental welfare of our children. We haven't done many studies on that subject. Children were traditionally directed to listen to just one person, the father, and sometimes that person cannot get a good job because he doesn't have marketable skills and another person, the mother, is the one bringing in the money instead. Usually, the power goes with the money. In consequence, if there is no understanding between husband and wife, the children will be affected, and the family may face a crisis at any moment thereafter.

Another aspect of the trauma experienced by Indochinese refugees in the U.S. is associated with communication—precisely, the new way of communicating. Learning English is not the only language problem we have. Things have changed so much and so fast. Everyone in the family seems to be become more independent. There is no longer such a person in the family who can say "yes" or "no", as in the past. Everything is in the forming.

Another problem came from the culture of the American society at large. This great country, this great nation, has a very distinctive culture. Although it is not written anywhere that I know of that this is precisely the American culture, you feel its presence everywhere.

I do not know how well I can portray the American child. I will try so that we can understand how the Indochinese children are coming into a new culture.

The American child is strongly influenced by education. But American education is strongly based on science and technology. Values are not taught in the public system of education. Therefore, the family has to inspire themselves from the churches and various religious organizations. The relationship between the churches and the American family seems to be rather loose. So the family tries to exert the influence on their child through the educational system. I also sense that peers play an important role in America. They exert a strong influence on the child. But the American child, as a product of American culture, shares in the American dream. He will seek opportunities to become a successful person, not necessarily a better person or a secured person, as defined earlier. We can see a dramatic shift from the Indochinese traditional objectives to the new code of success. In real terms, *American success means one must have materialistic wealth, power and individual freedom. This is a totally new definition of a better person.*

When the Indochinese child comes into this new situation and becomes Americanized, he or she will have destroyed many old and conventional things on his path. The relationship between parents and children will start to become a problem. When we transpose the traditional child into a new society, he will be mainstreamed. This is why we need to know a bit more of the cultural backgrounds from both sides. I do not mean to say that the American model is better or the Indochinese traditional model is better; we are just different, very different, from one another. Indochinese children play with themselves while American children are socially associated with adults most of the time. Very interesting things are happening. Our children do not have a special subject of focus when they talk to each other; the American kids seem to direct themselves towards some special interest.

Helping Children Grow in a New Society: Recommendations

I would like to touch upon something that I hope will come out of this conference. Try to be hopeful and help to find the way to make tomorrow a better day for all categories of children. This meeting, so timely sponsored by the International Catholic Child Bureau, is about the spiritual and non-materialistic needs of our Indochinese refugee youngsters. I still think that the family can play an important role. The clergy can play a very important role. All categories of social service and education-oriented associations can play a very important role in helping our young people to grow and meaningfully succeed in this new society. But we should consider a few things.

If today I could be reduced to the age of a child in a refugee family in this country, this is what I would sincerely wish to happen to me and my family. I wish there would be a change in attitude toward me. I wish to be seen and regarded as a person, an individual person. I would like to feel the compassion of the people with whom I am living. I wish my parents and my guardian would lower their tone and use appropriate language when they talk to me. They do not have to be so hard and so loud in their vocal expression. I wish they would be more careful in choosing their words while speaking to me so that I can keep my native language alive and learn something useful, something nice, at the same time. I wish our relationships would change among ourselves. I would like to see my father treating my mother better. I would like my mother to appreciate my father in his new and difficult situation. I would like them to be role models in my life. They might still be on welfare, but one should never forget about one's own dignity. I wish my parents would understand that what they receive from the government is not their income but only a form of assistance from the government and people of America. The function of the welfare assistance is to help us stand on our own feet.

Also, as a child I would like the clergy to have a changing attitude towards me, towards my family and friends. I would like to see religious leaders specialize a little bit more in concrete messages coming from religious values so when I go to see them I will learn something that will have a meaningful impact on my life. I wish to understand better why I am here as a person. Where I am going after I die, and how should I cope with things around me that I do not understand? I hope that the clergy will come up with new forms of communication, new scripts and maybe a new language to make it simpler for us to understand. Coming from the Theravadin Buddhist background like myself, I know how hard it is to understand the old language of Pali and Sanskrit. It would be helpful to have those formulas spelled out when we cite them. But a lot more should be done to make the intended message comprehensible to the children so that they can probe deeper into the roots of the great religions. *I would like our clergy to specialize in thinking how we can come together in a concerted effort to promote spiritual literacy.* I have the impression that we do not learn enough about each other. When we say one word, there are hundreds of ways to interpret that word. How can we better understand each other?

I wish also that our clergy would have a peaceful influence on our minds by being just a little more tolerant, not only towards us, the lay people, but towards each other, the members of the general clergy, as well. Do not try to put people down. It does not matter what faith we are. To have a religious faith means, basically, to believe in the existence of the Most High. It does not matter what you call it. It is always implied in our private feelings and attitudes as what one should do to reach the point of our destiny. And yet, as children, we continue to hear all kinds of biased talks around us. I think the clergy should rethink and help us to think about our own religious backgrounds and to come up with something which we can learn and be proud of.

As a child, I would like to see our numerous Indochinese associations matured and becoming genuinely concerned with the overall welfare of the general refugee population from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. I am afraid that too many organizations are geared toward the political thinking of the hour, and in the process they neglect the basic spiritual, intellectual and social needs of Indochinese children. I wish they would work harder on finding necessary resources, the kind of resources that would offer me and my peers some assistance so we can live a better life in this country.

I need to have friends, friends from all social and cultural backgrounds. Yes, I came from a particular culture, but I need to learn more about other cultures. Can you help me? Whether you are an M.A.A. or other type of association, you can help to find some white American families, Chicano, Black or other Asian families that I can visit and play with their children so we can know each other better and ultimately become friends. I would like to see resources of this nature multiply so that I can have a chance to appreciate better the values of other people. Because in the end, we are going to live in this country together for years and years to come.

If we came here as refugees, some 13 years ago, we are in the process of becoming immigrants. Do you know the difference? The refugees are politically persecuted in their homeland. The refugees concern themselves with only one thing: survival. The immigrants, on the other hand, are gearing towards opportunities for a better life for their families and their loved ones. I think that at least 99 percent of us will die in this land, as citizens of this great country. I wish to underline the special sense of being a citizen of the United States of America. I am talking about citizenry with all its moral implications. We do live in a nation – I appreciate the comment made earlier by Stefan Vanistendael that the earth should be shared. I think we still have to share it within the framework of nationhood and through a genuine and peaceful international cooperation. We have to know where we belong, and then we may proceed to all kinds of cooperation. From individuals we can extend to networking. If the network cannot do all the jobs that need to be done, then let us extend it further to partnership and go beyond as necessary.

I appreciate so much this rare opportunity to talk to you. As you know, I have not exhausted the subject. I feel that we have talked about some true feelings within us. I hope this conversation will lead us somewhere. Please reflect for a moment—we came a few years ago, thirteen years ago, and here I am in Washington, D.C., in the company of so many important people and being introduced by my friend, Tuan Phung. All this is unreal. Things are really happening. If I have any message left for us, I would say that we have to go to work, harder, and always remember a Chinese saying: *"Keep digging, keep digging, and don't call it a well until you see the water."* Thank you.

Asian refugee mother working in a vegetable garden in Merced, California.

PERSPECTIVES

☐ Perspective of a Hmong Catholic Parent

Kao Yang
Hmong Catholic National Association
St. Paul, Minnesota

Good morning. My name is Kao Yang. I was from Laos. I have been in this country since May 1976 and now I live in St. Paul, Minnesota. I am in my senior year in the Medical Technology Program at the University of Minnesota. In the past couple of years, I have been involved with the youth in our church and to some extent with the Hmong Catholic National Association.

I am here to represent parents, especially the Hmong parents. Because I do not have much knowledge about other ethnic groups from Southeast Asia, I will talk about the Hmong only. I would like to thank the ICCB for giving me the opportunity to participate in this conference.

What I will share with you today is about the conflict between parents and their children in this society. I am going to make it brief and simple. If I say anything that you do not understand or if you have any questions, please stop me so I can explain or repeat or you can talk to me afterward.

Maintaining Cultures and Traditions in a Complex Society

As parents, besides providing food and shelter for our children, there are many other things about our children that concern us: for example, finishing school and keeping them out of trouble. I have three children of my own. As I watch them growing up, I keep wondering what their futures will be like. *What will they lose or gain from their own tradition and culture?*

We are living in a very complex society, and our children have been influenced with many good ideas. In this country, they have a good opportunity for education and an open future. The bad aspect of life in this society is that the children are given too much freedom before they are ready for it. And there are so many undesirable messages that the children get from their peers or from the street.

The Hmong culture has a very strong family relationship and a very high regard for others. The Hmong treat both their father's and mother's family equally, as Khamchong mentioned this morning. In the Lao tradition, a couple builds their life in the middle of both families. It is essential that parents set the standard and then their children listen to it and follow it. But in this society, parents do not have as much control over their children as they used to. Many seem to feel that to discipline their children will create another problem or make the children run away or commit suicide, or they fear they could be charged with a crime for disciplining their children. In traditional Hmong society, distant relatives are as important as immediate family. You would consider a Hmong who has the same clan name as yours to be related to you. In this country, many of these Hmong traditions have been fading, and some children do not even know who their aunts and uncles are.

Acculturation versus Assimilation

As parents, we know that to survive in this country we must adapt to this society. *We want our children to adapt to whatever is necessary for them to get into the mainstream of life. But at the same time, we want them to retain their own traditions.* There are many examples, but I will just give one: the importance of keeping their marriage. As you know, the percentage of divorce or broken marriage is quite high in the United States. In the Hmong society, marriage is something that is truly honored, and parents do not want to see their children get divorced. Besides keeping the marriage, we would like to see them practice the traditional Hmong ceremony.

We need our identity, our heritage. All that we have or what we can do now is to hold onto our culture and pass it on to the future generations, so they will know who their ancestors were, and where they were from. It is difficult to get the children to keep the culture, because their daily life is so strongly influenced by their American friends' way of life. Because there is little time for children to be involved with their parents' traditional ways, they do not see the importance of it. They will do what they have learned from the outside–from school or friends. And what their parents want them to do is not their interest. Many of the children would say it is too hard to learn, because it is an unwritten task. They do not want to learn because they are in this country, and they want to do what the majority are doing. Many of the Hmong children cannot cope with two different cultures at the same time, with the American ways at school or outside the home, and with their own.

Because of the problems and conflicts that I and many others saw last year, in our church we developed a program to teach our youth. The program is based on *Valuing Value*, a manual from Catholic Education and Hmong culture combined. This program will help our children recognize the value of both cultures.

In conclusion, I would say that as parents, many times we cannot tell our children what to do, what to respect. We want someone else other than their parents to tell the young people how important it is to keep their own tradition and culture. We need help to find a better way to ease these transitions. And I hope that after this conference we will come up with some suggestions that will help to relieve the bi-cultural conflict.

☐ Through the Eyes of a Foster Parent

Carrie Donohue Riley
Foster Parent to Five Vietnamese Refugee Children
Camp Hill Village, USA
Kimberton, Pennsylvania

I would like to begin with some words that have resounded into my life very deeply: *"I am that mother; that is my child."*

It was in the mid-1960's when I was a student and friend of Dr. Margaret Bedard, counting her already then as one of the truly great people in my life. It was during my years studying sociology that I went with her one day to the United Nations. It was at a time when the Vietnam War was already raging but, quite honestly, had not penetrated the center of my life. I found myself with her in a small group of people listening to a personal address by the then Secretary General, U Thant. Somebody asked him to reflect on his own impressions of that war and he stopped, thought, and said:

> *When I see the photographs, when I know of the violence throughout that country, when I think of the burning villages and know of the women fleeing, carrying their children, I have to say in my soul: "I am that mother; that is my child."*

Later, in 1972, I had just come back from my first year living in the Camphill Community, a worldwide movement for mentally handicapped children and adults. I had lived just outside Belfast during the first year of internment and had been myself involved in some tragic moments of the continuation of that war. It was a rather shocking experience back in America, living out in a little cottage in the country for a short time as I did, to have that war come home to me in the form of, what is called in this country, a "hunting accident". In a kind of fiery blast that would affect my life very much for many years to come, again I met them: that woman, that mother, that child, and I counted myself as somehow involved in war in a way I could not yet fathom.

Later, in 1979, while a whole nation was starving in Cambodia and while whole families were fleeing by boat from Vietnam, I had the opportunity to go through an illness, a serious illness, and see on a kind of inner heart screen that an extreme illness can sometimes offer you the whole panorama of this suffering in Southeast Asia. Through experiencing that as deeply and inwardly as I could, I met them once again – that mother, that child. Maybe it was at that moment that what was described so beautifully this morning from the Laotian tradition came into my own family – an invitation to some unknown child: "Please come join our family and bring with you peace."

The path to "foster" parenthood really intensified for me then. I worked closely with the Lutheran Child and Family Service of Philadelphia. Six months later, a social worker's car pulled up in front of what suddenly felt like a very small house, and two boys stepped out. They were very frail, very frightened and lonely, somewhere highly developed, somewhere underdeveloped. There was Nam of Vietnamese/Cambodian parents. He had lived with his mother during the famine in Cambodia and witnessed the slow devastation and death of his family members. There was Cuong, who came with quite tangible scars of war and refugee suffering. Later, we would experience the depth of refugee trauma in him. What should we call each other? They emerged from a sports car, took my hand and said quite simply, "I am very happy to meet you, Mother."

Six years later, in 1986 – a similar scene. Two younger brothers and the older sister of Cuong had escaped from Vietnam in what had been an even more perilous journey. They survived the ravages at sea, even of piracy and a very tragic and prolonged kidnapping. They landed at Philadelphia Airport, placing before us the full burden of their childhood suffering. I will never forget the ride home from the airport, their first trip ever in a car. Freezing cold. March 6th. I asked myself as I looked in the rear view mirror at these countless terrified faces: "What right have I, what right have I? I am not even Asian. Even though for six years I have lived with their brother and his friend, I hardly know how to meet their pain. What will it be; how shall I heal?"

A few days later, on receiving the usual pamphlets and big packet for the orientation of foster parents, I discovered a poem written by an unknown Vietnamese refugee in 1978 at a refugee camp. It was a unique offering because it was in the words of those who have suffered this change.

> *We are lost in the tempests out on the open seas. Our small boats drift. We seek for land during endless days and endless nights. We are the foam floating on the vast ocean. We are the dust wandering in the endless space. Our cries are lost in the howling wind. Without food, without water, our children are exhausted until they cry no more. We thirst for land but are turned back from every shore. Our distress signals rise and rise again but the passing ships do not stop. How many boats have perished? How many families lie beneath the waves? Lord Jesus, do you hear the prayer of our flesh? Lord Buddha, do you hear our voice from the abyss of death? Oh, solid shore, we long for you. We pray for mankind to be present today. We pray for land to stretch its arms to us. We pray that hope be given us today, from any land.*

And so the questions began to come: What land, what home? Foster home – what is that? I have been told that it is acceptable and even expected to speak very personally here. It is only the experience of one foster mother on behalf of only five immediate foster children. I do it on behalf of so many other parents and other children called "foster", in order to share with you what ultimately has become even a kind of mystery. That mystery is quite simply: spiritual life, with all the solitude that must imply, is also a life lived in community.

Who are these refugee children? First, I recognize that they are children who come to us, to foster parents. I would urge that anyone that has to deal with foster parents would help them to recognize something in this regard. Somewhere in their own path in life, something has drawn these children to their new parents. A choice has been made – a choice by those whose journey goes beyond the physical choosing that our naturally-born children have made. The refugee children come choosing also, choosing the mantle of our parenthood. They come from the farthest corners of the world; that is something daily to grapple with. They come with a message which I love to remember in the words of the Indian poet, Tagore. They come with the message, maybe even written in the blood of war: *"God has not yet despaired of man."* They come then to my own children – in my case, two very lively little boys and later a little daughter. (In the course of subsequent events, I became a single parent.) And they recognized all of them together, the eight-foldedness of this family, a brotherhood and sisterhood that extends far, far beyond the ties of race and blood, into a future-bearing manifestation of real family life.

I wondered, I doubted, I feared: how is it going to be possible to hold all of this together? How will the food and the language and the warmth and the cold and the full trauma of this change show itself? I learned an incredible, humbling lesson that I will impart to you. Let the Asian children and their American or European new brothers and sisters work it out. Let them come and live together in the countless, mysterious, superbly honest ways that bridge all cultures and religions, even injuries and the deepest sorrows imaginable. These are the ways of the child and these very ways, the ways they will discover together if you stand back and surround them with your own inner honesty and touch on the depths of all religions.

The Experience of the Camphill Movement

In my case, the family was already extended, as I mentioned before, by community life and the Camphill Movement. For the past sixteen years, I have lived in this movement with adults labeled by some in this world as mentally retarded or developmentally disabled. I live in a village of 120 people, within one of twelve households where we live together. There are no separations of staff and clients, of salaried or non-salaried people. We are one of about seventy centers throughout the world in the Camphill Movement, which was founded almost fifty years ago by refugees from Europe during the Second World War, living under the image of that archetypal refugee of Middle Europe: someone called Kaspar Hauser.

Living with these so-called handicapped people, I discovered in them layer upon layer of still new abilities. I know their disabilities are an illusion in a way because their language goes into ways that I have yet to learn. They allow these Southeast Asian friends into their lives with a depth that has curative healing forces. In that first year, 1980, almost everybody in my house was either pre-verbal (one son) over-verbal (the four year old), or non-verbal (an aphasic friend). Some were barred from ordinary language by an inability to learn to read or write, or were struggling with a new language, or were, as in my case, trying to refine a learned language so that it would meet, with great reverence, what had come into our lives. This has proven to be an incredible bond, the bond of the word. We did not have the distraction of T.V., which we find to be a weapon against this kind of learning.

My home occupies four hundred beautiful acres of land, farmed biodynamically. We are privileged to offer a quality of food to our children who were, as most of them are, very starved in the beginning, having survived an often extreme lack of nourishing food in the refugee camp or even at home. But there again, there was something about the way the food was grown that offered not just physical nourishment but nourishment, respect, reverence for it and its growing on a much deeper level. It is food that holds this bond between our two cultures, so that body and soul and spirit maintain balance.

The children attend a Waldorf School. It has been a remarkable adventure for the teachers and for the students of the Kimberton Waldorf School, this taking of children so obviously wounded, deeply traumatized, suffering forms of pain spared and unknown to most American children, who, nonetheless, have other forms of deep pain. The Vietnamese children have been much respected, coming with a possibility around them for real education. One teacher stated that beyond the obvious wounds and trauma, there lives in the heart of such Southeast Asian youth an artistic sense, a moving, creative force for beauty, rarely seen in other children. This sense for art that has to be developed at every turn of the way can carry them and their often awe-struck classmates into a different sphere of education that, as he said, every teacher longs for.

Before I came today, I took in my hand again the Buddha figure molded from clay by one of my children as a gift to me – or the final exam of another child in the eighth grade who recently, in his world geography and religious course, described his religion, Buddhism, as "the gentle world religion". It is especially through these social and artistic forms that all of us can find a strengthening and deepening of the inner life of our American children or our non-Southeast Asian children and discover in this a contribution to Western culture that maybe, hopefully, comes just when it is needed most.

Being a Foster Parent: Lessons Taught by Children

I'd like to concentrate on a few ideas taught to me by my own children. First, the foster mother must connect with the biological mother in the daily task of raising and caring for the child.

Something has touched the lives of each person who offers to become a foster parent, even if it's unseen. One of the things is this invisible arching arm of a mother or a father from another side of the world who has said: "Please care for my child."

I find the sharing of the raising of a child with another mother to be a most powerful bond. Even one would dare say, a karmic bond that can transform this most horrible imaginable pain of human anguish – the loss through war of a beloved one – into an equally great blessing of human life, the expansion of love into its furthest reaches.

We must let that pain, the whole unbearable loss that they are experiencing, find its place in us – not an imagined place but a real place, carved out by daily inner work.

Second, when we are connected with the conscious recognition of these forces of destiny with the real parent, then we must share with the children, honestly and with courage, the depths of their sorrow, their pain.

It cannot live just in them. We cannot put that burden of loneliness on them even though they are all too willing and ready to accept it. We must make it our own pain in order to bring to bear on it our own forces for healing and for transformation. Without this effort on an ongoing daily basis, this battle with world pain, the anguish of our children can become rage and bitterness, an unspeakable torment. I've seen it in a teenage boy who came and would never allow the word "home" or "family" or the mention of his mother. It took six and one-half years before one day he could do what rarely had been possible. He came and cried, "I want my mother." Then he could go through something and go on with his life and connect with his home in a new way. It's slow, hard work, and people need to know it's hard work, but it touches on the essence of spirituality: the will to share suffering and even to change it.

To help with this full measure of sharing, one thing I discovered early on was to go to my children late in the night – to sit by their bed, to be with them as they sleep. Doing that I often feel how I long to go to the refugee camps, how I wish I could go to their country. But then I realize I must go there. One way of seeing what goes on there is to be with the children in the night. When they first come, watch the hands and feet, poised for escape – ready to clutch the few possessions, if any, that have been left to them. And then watch in the night, slowly as even in the day, the unfolding, the delicate unfolding as rest and renewal take over.

So too in illness. In that first year and years beyond, sickness after sickness came and colds turned into pneumonia and pneumonia become dangerous, and you're at the bedside with vigil day and night. It even happened two years ago. My eldest son fell ill and I stayed by him because he feared that he would die, as he saw many die at home and in the camps, from such illness. All the time, he clutched to him a simple white cloth, a handkerchief pressed into his hands by his father, the only possession he has from Vietnam, given to him one night as he crawled into a boat ten years ago, the first from his family to escape.

Third, we must learn to carry a vision of their people, their families, their nation, their religion. This is an inevitable meeting: the meeting of Buddhism with Christianity. It's no mere theological or philosophical concept but a day-by-day experience as alive as the faces at the dining room table. As was said this morning, it's at the dining room table where one welcomes others to come. We bless the meal. Who knows who's present besides the twelve or so usually there. And it doesn't matter whether the faces are older, younger, Irish, Asian. The connections that they make with each other are obvious.

Something that has been a great help to this meeting is the celebration of Buddhist and Christian festivals: being aware of and understanding the sacred moments in the lunar calendar and explaining the sacred moments in the Christian calendar. Take, for example, the Eastern veneration for the dead which we ourselves also attempt to carry in the cycle of the Christian year. At the same time, try combining it with an experience quite new to our Asian friends: the celebration of days of birth: the really reverent celebration. So too, in our home there are the holy places: the Buddha beside the bed or the little shrine, a light in the corner.

This is a precious point because it's an opportunity to share with you questions – deep, deep questions that have lived with me since this experience in 1972. And I'm sure we have to rethink them; we must rethink them. Questions like, "Why is it called an influx – thousands, tens of thousands of refugees – why an influx, a flowing into? Is it only a political side effect of war that brings East into West in the form of tens of thousands of future-bearing children? Or, beyond the pain, beyond the trauma that each of us experiences as so real – is theirs by some secret destiny in what their sacred tradition would even call karma, *is theirs a task to renew the very heart of the West:* the children's heart of the children's West in which they are forced to live?"

A young Cambodian boy taking care of a baby at the Ban Mai Rut refugee camp near Klong Yai, Thailand.

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Is their wounded psycho-social development, through the forms of healing it must cause us to develop and to exercise, a force for recreating life in those who extend refuge?

I will read something from one deeply-respected, remarkable scholar and teacher, Rudolf Steiner, writing in Berlin in 1911. He said:

> *The time is coming when you will see clearly that we have now reached the point where a fusion of Christianity and Buddhism will take place, just as in the case of the Judaic religion and Christianity.*

I ask: "A fusion, a confluence, what flows in and why, by boat? What images do we see in our time?" We see vast numbers of people as courageous as earlier Vikings but in tiny, overcrowded pirated vessels, seek new shores, establish asylum, shake by the shoulders, as it were, mighty nations and small nations of both East and West.

Hope in the Children

I come to the end of this presentation with a question. Can we not find the hope in the children themselves? Even in the midst of their unspeakable trauma which we've come to describe together, can we not find the hope that they will fulfill through their apparent displacement, a rare task in human evolution, a building of a new form of temple that will offer refuge and create new possibilities for the deepest forms of veneration we so tragically and urgently need? Can we see the transformation in progress, utterly dependent as it is on our own inner willingness to change–the transformation of these thousands from children of a warring world to bearers of a new heart.

In another kind of refugee camp in World War II, there was a young Dutch Jewish woman, Etty Hillesum, who wrote words that have inspired me, moved me, kept me going. I offer them in closing to you.

> *I feel that I am a minute battlefield upon which the ambiguities and wars of this day and age are being fought out. There is, in fact, no choice but to humbly put oneself at the*

disposal of the problems and let oneself be turned into a battleground by them. For the problems need a refuge; they must find a place where they can flare up and calm down. We, the poor little people—and, here I count myself smallest among you—we, the poor little people, have to open our inner room for them. We cannot run away.

Perspective of Southeast Asian Catholic Clergy

Father Peter Tran
Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugee
U.S. Catholic Conference

Last winter, before Christmas, I led an advent retreat for the Laotian community in Chicago for both parents and young children. Afterwards, I drove quite a few children home with me in the van. Sitting behind me were two young Laotian girls, eight and ten years old. I could not help listening to their conversation. The younger one asked the older one, "What kind of a car are you going to buy when you grow up?" The older one said, "I don't know, maybe a fast one." And the younger one said, "Well, I am going to buy a car that says 'the heartbeat of America.'" Just imagine, a few years ago these young kids were in refugee camps, having no idea about cars. Now they are living in our consumer society. We have to improve our spiritual messages a great deal because we have to compete with other kinds of messages out there that feed our children.

In the past few years we have given retreats to the Laotian community throughout the country. The Laotian mission team is comprised of Father Louis Leduc from Fort Worth, Texas, Sister Alice Kupouthay, from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and myself. Last year we wanted to find out from these young children what their image of God was. The exercise was very simple. We suggested many images of God to these children and asked them to choose from among these. For example, is God the God of compassion? Or is God the God of indifference, who doesn't care or have concern in this world? Is this the God of authority who somehow likes to strike the people with thunder and lightning? Or is this the God who likes to see people suffer, or see people in pain?

Coming from the background of grief, loss, alienation, and uprootedness, we might suspect that the God that they would identify is the God who does not care or the God who likes to see people suffer. Amazingly enough, the majority of these children identified God as the God of compassion, of love and mercy. (Interestingly enough, one of the children said my God is the God of money!) Anyway, why is this the image of God for the young adults who have suffered so much in the refugee camps or perhaps at home?

Fruits of our Religious Tradition

First of all, many of those communities we visited have something in common. One is the religious education of the young. Many of these young adults have the opportunity for what we call in our religious faith, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, or C.C.D. Why are these classes so important? The primary purpose of religious education in our tradition is to help the children to come to experience the presence of God in their lives. In our tradition, God has fully revealed himself through Jesus Christ; thus, through scriptures the children come to know Jesus and they come to know his stories. These young people would learn, for example, what it means to forgive not seven times seven but rather seventy times seven; to be compassionate to the unfortunate, the poor, and those who are sick. They come to learn what it means to respect individuals despite whatever you are, whether you are Mary Magdalene, the woman of ill repute, or Zaccheus, the short little man, or a foreigner like the woman at the well. We need to learn what it means to love as Jesus loved. These are only some examples of the experience of God that they have received in their religious education.

Furthermore, they learn to receive the sacraments. These sacraments are more than symbols of the reality of God's presence in their lives which the children embody in the many faces of their lives until they become adults. It is through this religious formation that the children somehow come to learn the experience of God, which is experience of goodness, love, truth, and justice. And so it is not surprising that God to these people is the God of love and compassion.

Secondly, we discover through our retreats that most of these young children have some kind of sense of morality. They have a good sense of what is right and what is wrong. This certainly is the product of the religious education that they have received.

Thirdly, our religious tradition has given us the community of people. We call it the community of believers. Why is this so important? In Chicago, for example, we usually gather in front of the church after mass and talk about the service and our experiences of the past week. At the same time, children play around us in front of the church. One Sunday, I thought to myself, "Wow, this is really neat. The children probably have no idea at all what their parents are talking about, but they know that their parents are talking with their priest. They know and feel reassured that these adults are there. These are the people who will certainly help them if needed."

It is a sense of stability and security that somehow we have instilled in these children. Those children may be foreign-born and once looked like refugees, but they did not look like refugees to me then. They had an air of confidence in life. They had the sense of belonging, of having roots. I believe that our religious traditions have brought these people together as a community, as a family.

Our religious traditions teach us as a community to celebrate life. The celebration can be in so many forms: in the church service or Sunday liturgy, a picnic in the park, or perhaps Christmas and New Year's celebrations. We usually incorporate our own cultural heritage and values into all these celebrations. Culture is the way we live, and to our people, this means respecting our elders, valuing education, and wishing the best for others in the Baci ceremony or New Year's celebration. Our children learn to celebrate life in all these communal celebrations.

Concerns from a Laotian Catholic Perspective

I would like to raise a few concerns at this time from the Laotian Catholic perspective. There are few Catholic Laotian-speaking priests and sisters in this country, even though the priests and sisters try to visit this community at least once a year. Some parents do not know how to register their children in the religious formation. Sometimes the problem is a language barrier. But often the problem is not so much the lack of outreach and reception from the local church, but rather a lack of sensitivity and understanding of cultural differences.

For example, there is an elderly man who knows that Father is always at church. He doesn't make an appointment. He knows if he goes to church he will see Father. He usually doesn't bring up his problems until after a long conversation. I was going to have a meeting at eleven o'clock one morning when the woman at the door told me that an elderly man wanted to see me. So, I came out and sat down in the parlor with him.

As we were talking about many things, I knew that he had something in mind, but he just couldn't express it. You have to be patient and wait until the time comes, and he will raise the subject matter. But, at the same time, he did not know I had an appointment at eleven o'clock. Toward the end I said I was going to a meeting. He said, "Okay, go to the meeting." Then he said, "Oh, Father, I want to talk to you about something," and then he took out a piece of paper and gave it to me. This is the kind of cultural sensitivity we have to educate our priests in the different local churches about.

Another concern is the change of spirituality. The parents of these Asian children, the Catholic ones, are comfortable with devotional spirituality. They find solace and comfort in the devotional acts, like saying the rosary and spiritual exercises such as frequent confession and mass. There is nothing wrong with this; however, there could be a conflict between the parents and the children.

A young teenage girl came to me for confession one day. She knelt down and she said nothing. I asked her, "Would you like to say something?" She said, "No." I said, "Do you want to go to confession?" She said she didn't but that her mother ordered her to go there and was watching her.

In another instance, a mother and her three daughters were saying their usual night prayers by reciting and praying the rosary together, three decades. If you are Catholic you know that three takes a long time for children. One of the daughters was falling asleep as they started the third. Her mother screamed at her, saying that God was punishing her, and began to hit her. Corporal punishment is not something unusual in our culture.

In a country like America, individuality, independence, and freedom of speech and thoughts can be expressed. This is encouraged in the school system and makes a big impression on the children's lives. Spirituality then tends to be highly personalized as well. A relationship that is meaningful to oneself comes into play. It takes the place of a devotional spirituality that their parents are used to, and this is where the conflict lies.

Thirdly, in teaching the message of the good news, or an expression of faith, our Roman Catholic tradition is important to our young people today. We have to be creative in delivering the messages of the faith. We have to be open and willing to be creative in our teaching. Children need interaction. They need to ask questions and receive answers, not to memorize or listen to lectures, as when I went to school. The learning process can be a fun experience for all.

We also have to keep ourselves updated. We have to be as updated as the commercial, "the heartbeat of America." Otherwise, these young children will say to one another, "Do we have to go to these stuffy classes again?"

The Need for Religious Formation

In the gospel of St. Mark, people were bringing little children to Jesus for him to touch them. The Disciples turned them away, but when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them:

> *Let the little children come to me. Do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Then he put his arms around them, laid His hands on them and gave them His blessing. (Mark 10:13-16)*

What is so important in this story is that the Lord Jesus ordered them to let the children come to Him. Then what did He do? He put his arms around them, he laid His hand upon them, and blessed them. Our spiritual and religious tradition follows this great symbolic example of Jesus. It is his intention that we have the responsibility to bring the children him, to let them come to experience the presence of God, to experience God's life and God's love.

Before I came to Washington, D.C. a month ago, I received a nice plaque for my work in housing in Chicago. On this plaque there were children painted on a mural on a wall, as well as children who were playing on the ground. Written on the wall is a saying,

> *There are two lasting gifts that we can give to our children. One is roots. The other is wings.*

As adults, we can become so involved in our little world that we forget the little ones around us. We become like the Disciples, who turned those little children away from Jesus. If we do so, we are the ones who give our children nothing, neither roots nor wings. We need to become like our Lord Jesus' example.

☐ Perspective of a Buddhist Monk

Venerable K. Uparatana
Buddhist Viahara Temple
Washington, DC

The ICCB invited me to attend this conference to discuss the concerns of Buddhist monks for the spiritual development of their children.

I was a born a Buddhist in Sri Lanka. When I was seven or eight, my grandfather began to take me to the temple. My grandfather was a former Buddhist monk, and he encouraged me to practice and study Buddhism. I became a monk when I was 11, and I became a high ordained monk in 1974. The keynote speaker explained the role of the monks in Laos and Vietnam. The same applies for Sri Lanka. Buddhist monks are the spiritual and educational leaders in the villages. Buddhists come to the temple and study questions pertaining to family and social problems. They ask the Buddhist monk questions, share knowledge, and work together to approach problems.

According to Buddhist teaching, children are a great gift to their parents. *We believe that parents are the primary teachers on spirituality to their children through their acts of kindness, patience, understanding, compassion, and care.* Children are so innocent because they lack experience that we have as adults. I think that parents, teachers, and other adults need to take greater care to understand the child's mind. We need to work harder together to learn ways to be more patient with children.

As a Buddhist monk, it is a great opportunity for me to train the children when they attend Sunday school. They come to the temple to learn about Buddhist teachings through stories, recitations, meditation, and group discussion. We teach the five precepts: *telling the truth, no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct and no abusing drugs.* We use certain stories for children that teach morality and the importance of practicing generosity, kindness, love, and compassion. We think it is also important for them to meet, learn, and play with other children at the temple.

The Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Amerasian parents who come to our temple are concerned about the spiritual development of their children and want them to attend the temple, but there are two obstacles preventing them from more participation: lack of transportation and lack of time because they frequently work two or more jobs.

My closing recommendation is that monks have to continue to work with parents and educators to teach our children, share our knowledge with them, and help them. Why? *Because the children are the heart of our future. What they learn from us now will contribute to their development as future adults.*

☐ Perspective of an Amerasian

Anh Dung
Utica, New York

I am a little bit taller than the normal Vietnamese. Some of the Vietnamese here do not believe that I am also Vietnamese!

My name is Anh Dung Nguyen, and I am an Amerasian. My father was a U.S. serviceman, and my mom is Vietnamese. I came to the United States five years ago, sponsored by the Resource Center for Refugees in Utica, New York. I am also a sophomore at Mohawk Valley Community College, majoring in electrical engineering.

It is a pleasure for me to be here, meet you, and share and learn more about our spiritual beliefs. I did not know much English when I arrived here. The two words I knew were "thank you" and "okay". If somebody gave me something, I said, "Thank you." If somebody told me to do something, I said, "Okay." When they put me in high school, people began making fun of my name. When the kids saw me in the hallway, they would say, "Hey, Anh, are you on or off today?" I would say, "I am always Anh!"

I follow my mom's religion, which is Buddhist, but I do go to church every week because I don't see anything wrong with that. If you go to church you learn something new about Christianity; if you go to the temple, you learn something about Buddha. Between Jesus and Buddha I can find nothing wrong.

I found that a lot of kids who came here [from Asia] were ashamed of what they are, their language, their traditions, and their beliefs. I told them there is nothing to be ashamed of; America is made up of many ethnic groups – French, German, Dutch, Vietnamese, and so forth. We are the next generation of Americans. There is nothing to be ashamed of. I think you should be proud of speaking more than one language. I speak Vietnamese and English; I received an award for Spanish in high school, and now I am working on Chinese. What's wrong with that? If you speak more than one language, it is good for you.

It is true that when you come here you have to adapt to American culture. But, the only way to do that is to study and try harder – three times harder than most Americans who already speak the language. I told them I have a part-time job, thirty hours a week, and I carry nineteen and one-half credit hours. They say, "Wow, how do you do it?" I say, "Don't watch T.V.; go home and study!" They say, "I want my MTV," but I say, "Turn it off if you want to study! You cannot do both things at the same time! Look at Connie Chung. She is a Chinese-American and she's also famous." (Some don't even know who she is because all they watch is MTV.)

I also tell them if you are living on food stamps, that means that you are living on someone else's money – and someone else is working hard and paying taxes! If you need food stamps for a while it is okay, but you have to work to support yourself. You have to find your place in society.

American tradition is not written anywhere, but you are always aware of it. There are a lot of stereotypes. If you look at a motorcycle gang, with kids wearing leather jackets, you say "This guy is no good!" So don't do it. They do it to Asian people, too, because they have a hard time accepting us.

That's how it is in America; if a new group comes to this country, it is going to take time for them to understand us. We are new and different, and if you don't work hard, then you are going to make it more difficult for the newcomers to adapt to this society.

Gratitude and Hope

In conclusion, I think that this is a great country. I think everybody here is great, and if it weren't for many of you, I wouldn't be here today or have come this far. So we do thank you for all the help and all the things you did for us – Cambodians, Laotians, or Vietnamese. If I were in a Communist country, I wouldn't have a future. I wouldn't have enough food to eat. I used to see the Amerasian kids who were abandoned from their families, eating off the table from what people left in restaurants. After the Communist takeover and the Americans left, nobody wanted to have an Amerasian kid because the government would give your family a lot of trouble. They consider us American and we were ignored. We were lucky that the American government paid attention to us and brought us home. I think that this is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me, and I am going to do my best in this country to make this a better America for everybody.

☐ Mental Health Perspective

Dr. Kirk Felsman
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry
Dartmouth Medical School
Hanover, New Hampshire

I want to note that I am speaking from the perspective of a clinician, a psychologist whose attention and effort are focused on individual refugee youth and their families or caregivers.

Caution against Assumptions

I will start by offering the dictum, "It is the exceptional case that proves the rule." There is such an enormous variation in the individual "refugee experience" although we try to establish commonalities and generate a framework of understanding . My concern is that we may make, at the individual or family level, erroneous assumptions about what someone has experienced.

Let me use the model of play therapy for illustration. In child work where "play is at hand", the play is a medium for creating meaning of experience. I don't know how many times I have had a notion of what the play means and feels like to the child and have quickly ventured an interpretation. However, if I had not waited, the interpretation would have been inaccurate and the play might have ceased. I would have interrupted the process of making meaning out of the child's experience.

This reflection on our assumptions has implications for our thinking about the non-material needs of refugee youth and our definition of "youth." Indeed, there are many adolescents who at the arbitrary age of 18 suddenly become "young adults" in the language of the PRPC (Philippine Refugee Processing Center). They are considered mature by those administrators who "process" them. Yet, developmentally, many are still very young.

Culture and Tradition: Access and Preservation

We often talk about trying to preserve culture and tradition. Some of the children and youth that I have worked with have not lived or been raised in traditional culture, especially those children of "longstayers". For them it becomes much more a matter of discovering or having access to elements of their cultural heritage. They are not attempting to preserve it because it is not something that has already been internalized. Preserving culture is a serious issue for their parents, but for many youth it is something to be acquired. How clinicians and caseworkers support and help provide access to those things is very important. It should be noted that access to cultural heritage is an ambivalent matter for many refugee youth, because at the same time they are trying to adjust to a new culture.

Let me give you an example. I have a research assistant, a young woman student at Dartmouth who is Vietnamese. Last year, we were talking about working overseas, and she began to relate her camp experience as a child. Her family departed Vietnam by boat and managed to reach Hong Kong. This is where her camp experience began at about 8 years of age. As she started talking about that period of her life, she was openly wondering what it would be like to go back and see the camp and perhaps work at it. I said, "Why not; you could try to get a stipend or scholarship. I am also sure that you could be quite helpful in the camp. Why don't you approach some of the college officials?" The long and short of it is that she was able to go back for a period of time, only a few months. Nevertheless, it was an important experience for her. She helped as a teacher, tutoring and working with students in the camp's schools. She was also available as an informal resource for kids and parents to talk about what life would really be like in America. It seemed to have had a profound impact on her in terms of understanding who she is and where she came from. She was able to integrate important elements of her cultural background with her personal experience. Since returning, she has been more active in doing tutoring and voluntary work with one of the local resettlement agencies. She has become a resource for them and an important role model for refugee youth.

Overseas and National Mental Health Services

I would like to make a few remarks about the limits of mental health services that are available to adolescent refugees, both here in the U.S. and in overseas camps. The resources overseas vary dramatically from camp to camp. For example, in the Philippines, working at the Refugee Processing Center in Bataan is very different than working in the first asylum camp on the island of Palawan. The same can be said of service provided in other camps such as in Thailand, Malaysia, and Hong Kong.

I have been aware of the difficulty in establishing contact and developing networks in the U.S. It has taken some real effort to get a better understanding of what is going on across the country. For example, the Refugee Technical Assistance Program in Minnesota and some of the important work that Marta Brendan and other people are doing right now regarding

Amerasian resettlement have been enormously helpful for me. I realize how easily we can get isolated from each other and think this reflects the limited services that exist nationally. Resources and services vary from region to region, state to state, and from one side of town to the other.

The clinical work I have done since returning to the U.S. has been as a collaborator. Though I have seen 4 or 5 adolescent refugees individually or in combination with their foster parents, I think the work that has been the most useful is trying to support and enable caseworkers and other people who are really part of the adolescents' daily lives. In some cases, my role provides professional sanction or leverage, helping them acquire access to the resources they need and to which they are entitled. My sense is that the majority of psychologists, psychiatrists, or social workers are often reluctant to get clinically involved with refugee patients for a number of reasons: one, it can be extremely time consuming; two, there are often language difficulties; three, many psychological instruments are inappropriate for this population; and finally, these circumstances create a situation in which the clinician risks the feeling of being incompetent. It is very hard to feel that you cannot do enough or are not sure where to turn next. So many clinicians avoid getting involved in evaluations that test their professional limits.

I want to mention a few things about working with individual adolescent refugees and in some sense trying to lobby for their special needs within the school system. I will give you a case example in just a minute. First, I want to emphasize that it is everyday casework that takes so much time and ultimately makes all the difference. It requires enormous effort to establish and maintain a solid network of reliable people in a particular community. For example, I think it is mistake to make "blind" referrals for professional consultation. By "blind" I mean that you do not know or have not had any experience with the clinician. I have seen too many reports from people who were not clear about the limits of their own expertise and have reached very faulty conclusions, as well as having made inappropriate recommendations about what is in a child's best interest. Know who it is you can work with effectively.

Improving Assessments

I would also like to comment on the kinds of assessments I have seen not only in the camps overseas, but here as well. Occasionally, I end up providing second opinions, seeing a child that has had a hard time of it and often, had at least one previous evaluation elsewhere. By the time I see them, there are some questions about whether they will be able to stay in their school, in their current home, or need to be moved to another community.

My first concern with many reports is to sort out fact from opinion. This touches what I said earlier, where people's feelings and beliefs don't get qualified and unfortunately are sometimes recorded as fact.

The second thing is that reports tend to be too individually-focused. The attention may bear almost exclusively on the child, without paying enough attention to the child in the family context.

Third, there is often a failure to assess family strengths. Rather than focusing on assessing psychopathology, we need to acknowledge an individual's or family's assets. These strengths can be developed to help people increase their coping capacity and initial adjustment.

Finally, most of the reports do not include follow-up plans and long-range contingency plans. Clinicians should provide more direct follow-up. Clients report, "We went and got an assessment, and they basically told us what we already knew; they just put it in different jargon. It wasn't very helpful." There are many very good clinicians and case workers out there. But, their numbers and available time are limited. It is important to identify good clinicians with whom you can build strong collaborative relationships. It will make a real difference to your work with refugee youth.

A Case Example

Here is a brief case example for illustration. I recently did an evaluation of a 14-year-old Vietnamese boy who had been separated from his maternal aunt. The aunt had been charged with child abuse, having reportedly hit the boy with a stick a number of times. Initially, they had been living in a modest sized city in New Hampshire, but he had been removed from the home and had been placed in licensed foster care in a small rural town. I was provided with the school teacher's observations and spoke with the caseworker at length. I also had the opportunity to be in contact with the judge who had heard the case and had ordered a broader evaluation.

First, it was immediately clear that there had never been a complete assessment of this boy's academic needs. He had been placed in a school that had no English as a Second Language services. He had been put in a resource room with a number of children with serious learning disabilities and behavior problems, though he did not appear to have any learning disability, nor had his behavior been problematic at school. Secondly, there was no attention given to his aunt at all. I started reading the notes and asked, "How is she doing? Is she depressed? What is going on with her? What prompted this behavior, what are all these multiple moves about, and where is she now?"

From what I could gather, the people involved in the case had approached the aunt in a very confrontational way. She acknowledged having hit the boy and said that she couldn't control him anymore. The investigation, I suspect, must have shamed her terribly, leaving her humiliated and depressed. She soon moved and simply left town. The child has had no contact with her, and, in fact, no one had followed up.

The judge, who appeared very well-intentioned, believed the boy needed to be "Americanized." He had suggested to the social worker in the courtroom that she take him to the Canopy Lake Park, a big amusement center on the New Hampshire coast and to a baseball game. My reactions could have been negative; however, I found out after speaking with the judge that his suggestions resulted from naivete and not knowing what questions to ask.

I assured him that some things he had said were quite important and that the foster family needed support to help this child make contacts in the community. But I was also concerned that as a teenager he was very isolated from other adolescent refugees. I recommended that he have access to other refugee youth in the Lutheran program within the state and also suggested that if the boy wanted to, he should have the option to go to Boston or Amherst, Massachusetts and connect with the various programs there. I suggested they consider finding funds to allow him to attend a summer camp for adolescent refugees. The judge's response was quite favorable. Had I held onto my initially negative reaction, I might not have taken the time to take these extra steps, which, in the end, I think, provided this boy with a much-needed opportunity.

Something else I really want to stress is that I think there is a terrible need for active involvement of trained, adequately-paid refugees in the mental health professions at the paraprofessional and professional level. Sufficient monies need to be made available to support scholarships and the professional internship programs that would allow refugee students/trainees to live at a level that is adequate while acquiring the training they needed.

Career choices are made with considerations of economics and the reality of how their profession would be perceived in the wider Vietnamese community. It has been hard for them. One young man who has worked with us and been extremely helpful is now in medical school. He has gone back to the camp a number of times during his summer breaks and works very hard while he is there. I think if he were to talk openly about going into psychiatry as a field of medicine, he would run into some difficulties with his family and his refugee friends, who have pushed him towards a more lucrative area of specialty surgery. It is very important that we create better-funded opportunities for refugees to acquire education, training, and professional credentials. It is equally important that sanction for such professions increase within the refugee community itself.

Increasing Collaboration

Finally, I want to note that there are models that demonstrate the potential interface between traditional Western mental health and medical services on the one hand and more traditional Asian approaches to treatment on the other. When these models interface, I think refugees often receive better services. Certainly, the usage of services goes up. Overseas, the traditional healing centers that have been set up by Jean Pierre Hiegel and Colette Londrac (the first, a French neurologist and psychiatrist and the second, a French child psychologist) have been running for years now in Thailand, in the camps of Khao I Dang, Phanat Nikhom, and Ban Napho. They would be the first to tell you that these programs are not ideal, but they have certainly increased collaboration between Western-trained physicians and mental health workers and the traditional healers within the refugee community. The result has been the strengthening of services delivered for the refugees in the camp. More recently, a traditional healing center has been established at the Philippines Refugee Processing Center in Bataan. In actuality, traditional healing had been practiced all over the camp, but now, with official sanction, healers are receiving work credit and are able to collaborate with other Western-trained professionals both at the hospital and mental health center. Many of the paraprofessionals trained by the Community Mental Health and Family Services group play crucial roles in enabling this collaboration between the healers and the Western clinicians.

In conclusion, there is a need for more active involvement of refugees in the mental health field. Increased scholarships and higher pay are needed to enable the acquisition of professional credentials, and increased sanction must come from the refugee community itself. Thank you.

Kampuchean mother with baby arriving at the holding camp at Khao-I-Dang, Thailand, located 30 km north of Aranyaprathet, a town on the Thai-Kampuchean border.

☐ Mental Health Perspective

Dr. Carolyn Williams
Clinical Psychologist
University of Minnesota
School of Public Health
Minneapolis, Minnesota

My work started off as a clinician working with individuals and mostly children, adolescents, and their families – kids who were already identified as having problems after resettlement in this country. My practice is primarily in the Twin Cities since that's where I live. Gradually my work has taken more of a public health focus, and refugee children obviously are at very great risk for mental health problems. They are a very logical group to target for prevention, rather than waiting until you have to intervene or treat their problems.

Actually, we know a lot about mental health issues and refugees. We have an awful lot of information available to us from previous refugee movements. In thinking in terms of Judeo-Christian teachings, I think the book of Exodus as an example of the first refugee movement.

Three years ago, I compiled a bibliography for the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) on refugee publications; there are over five hundred citations in this bibliography. There is a lot of information, though unfortunately it tends to be ignored. Those of us who are aware of the available information talk in terms of always "reinventing the wheel" and get somewhat frustrated by that process.

Over the last two years, after doing the bibliography, I continued to work at the National Institute of Mental Health Technical Assistance Center on refugee mental health. Those of you probably already know this – NIMH and the Office of Refugee Resettlement collaborated three years ago and funded twelve states to upgrade mental health services for refugees and funded the University of Minnesota to be the Technical Assistance Center.

My work in the last two years has been in the area of prevention, and that is why I am particularly delighted to be here today. I see that the topic of this conference, "Meeting the Spiritual Needs of Refugee Children", to be very much an important aspect of preventing mental disorders and promoting mental health. This morning's session has been full of important information demonstrating that the spiritual needs of refugee children are very much linked to promoting mental health. Our cultural heritage and our religious values often serve as protective factors in times of stress and trauma. We have ceremonies that mark the rites of passage, like marriage; we have ceremonies that help us through times of tremendous loss, like the death of a loved one.

Different World Views

Our culture and our religion become so much a part of us that we sometimes see the world through a biased perspective. I sometimes think in terms of having blinders on. These blinders do not cause us any trouble or any problems if we remain within our cultural or religious group of origin. But, as we know, refugees are forced to leave their culture of origin and do not have the luxury of remaining within their own native culture.

Resettlement often requires loss of the old values and ways of life, and the following poem illustrates the potential cultural clash between native Americans and many Southeast Asians. It is called "An Asian View of Cultural Differences", and it is by Dr. Mai Van Trang. I think that this poem and description certainly can lead to over-generalization and the stereotypes that Dr. Felsman has warned us against. I also think it teaches us, or encourages us, to think in terms of the blinders we have on when we are viewing the world, and it also illustrates the potential for misunderstandings between people with very different world views. I acknowledge that although it carries a risk of over-generalization and potential for stereotyping, the poem is a valuable teaching tool to look at different world views.

An Asian View of Cultural Differences

Dr. Mai Van Trang

We live in time.	*You live in space.*
We are always at rest.	*You are always on the move.*
We are passive.	*You are aggressive.*
We like to contemplate.	*You like to act.*
We accept the world as it is.	*You try to change it according to your blueprint.*
We live in peace with nature.	*You try to impose your will on her.*
Religion is our first love.	*Technology is your passion.*
We delight to think about the meaning of life.	*You delight in physics.*
We believe in freedom of silence.	*You believe in freedom of speech.*
We lapse into meditation.	*You strive for articulation.*
We marry first, then love.	*You love first, then marry.*
Our marriage is the beginning of a love affair.	*Your marriage is the happy end of a romance.*
It is an indissoluble bond.	*It is a contract.*
Our love is mute.	*Your love is vocal.*
We try to conceal it from the world.	*You delight in showing it to others.*
Self-denial is a secret to our survival.	*Self-assertiveness is the key to your success.*
We are taught from the cradle to want less and less.	*You are urged every day to want more and more.*
We glorify austerity and renunciation.	*You emphasize gracious living and enjoyment.*
Poverty is to us a badge of spiritual elevation.	*It is to you a sign of degradation.*
In the sunset years of life we renounce the world and prepare for the hereafter.	*You retire to enjoy the fruits of your labor.*

It is not surprising that refugee children are seen by their parents as losing the old culture. You are not born with a culture; you learn about your culture through your experiences, and children learn from many sources: parents, siblings, teachers, and peers. Culture is not a static thing. It is constantly changing, and so the culture that refugee children are learning is not the culture that their parents learned from their parents.

What you have is refugee children potentially being exposed to very differing world views as illustrated in the poem, and this can lead to clashes between what they learn in the family and what they learn at school or on television. This is not a new discovery from the Southeast Asians. We knew about this from other refugee groups, and it has been labeled by sociologists "inter-generational conflict". It is something that we could have anticipated as being a problem in adaptation. Children do acculturate faster, and this does contribute to inter-generational conflict.

Cultural clashes and cultural barriers are another really important source of stress for refugees. Religious values and practices are often areas of biggest differences. We certainly must be aware of this and provide for these needs and differences in our resettlement programs.

Culture and Religion: Areas of Conflict and Protection

I would like to give you a few examples of what I am talking about, about culture and how cultures and religion can serve as protective factors, and how they can be areas of conflict, as well. I think you may well be aware that the Hmong (and again I am going to be making some generalizations, and please excuse me for doing that, but it is hard to illustrate some of these points without making generalizations) often are very reluctant to accept some aspects of Western medicine, particularly surgery. It is against some of their religious beliefs and values of ancestor worship, animism, and reincarnation.

Not too long ago, a Hmong baby was born in the Twin Cities [Minnesota], and the child needed cardiac surgery to correct a birth defect. The baby, two months old, was in a hospital, and the physicians wanted to do the surgery immediately. This is illustrative of a Western viewpoint of the supremacy of the technology: let's get it done, let's get in there and correct this slight error. The family wanted to try spiritual rituals instead. They left the hospital against medical advice. The child was very sick, and the parents were very caring parents, so the baby ended up in another hospital, and again we very quickly had the same situation of the surgeons wanting to get in there and do the surgery right away; in fact, the hospital officials were contemplating getting a court order for the surgery. It probably would have been fairly easy for them to get because there was an urgent need for this child to have surgery.

In this situation, a Hmong home health worker intervened. She talked with the surgeons, and they agreed that they could wait two days without putting the child in jeopardy. The child was in the hospital receiving care in an oxygen tent. Then the Hmong worker went to the family and did some negotiating with them. They had to modify some of their religious practices in that some of the ceremony had to be carried out in their home – the incense burning and the candles – because of the danger with the oxygen tent. The hospital allowed some aspects of this ceremony to be carried out in the child's room as well. Once the parents had the opportunity to practice their beliefs and the child was still ill, they were much more accepting of Western medicine, and the baby had the surgery.

Had this Hmong home health worker not intervened, the child may have been healed physically, but think of the damage to the spiritual needs of the child and the family.

I left out another important factor in this case history: in the first hospital there was also a Hmong health worker. I want to point that out because these individuals serve very difficult roles. They walk very thin lines between the traditional cultures and the culture of the surgeons and the physicians. In the first hospital, the family felt that the health worker was more allied with the surgeons, and so they were not accepting of the help. It is likely that they did some groundwork that allowed the second worker to step in, but I think that it is very important to point out their very difficult role. Some people have labeled them "cultural brokers."

I am going through the next example very quickly because I think it is one that is obvious to people in this room. As Western practitioners (those of us who would label ourselves in that way), we can misinterpret behaviors. This example involved a young Lao man who was admitted to a psychiatric unit for psychotic depression. He had become increasingly isolated, he was very quiet, and he spent most of this time sitting in a corner contemplating. He also shaved his eyebrows and his head. Some on the psychiatric unit judged that to be fairly bizarre behavior.

They also talked about his being almost catatonic, he was so withdrawn. This individual left the hospital, but later we found out through a Hmong social worker from the community that the man was in a Lao temple. Very early in his life, as a young boy, he had gone to a temple and become a Buddhist monk with the crisis of leaving his country as an unaccompanied minor. With resettlement in the U.S., he had tried to live outside of the monastery. But later, he decided that he wanted to return to his former religious life and entered a monastery in the Twin Cities [Minnesota], and by all accounts he was doing very well. Again, this case illustrates how we can misinterpret behavior by our cultural blinders.

Viewing Refugees as Easy Converts

The last case I want to bring up is actually a very troubling and controversial one that we report in our book on refugee mental health. I want to mention that we really do not know the extent of problems like this, but when they do occur, they can be very devastating, as this quote will illustrate. As I have talked with people, some indicate that this is a problem. It occurs when churches or other religious groups and organizations view refugees, and perhaps children, as very easy converts. The following quote summarizes the harm of this approach. It is from one of the Twin Cities newspapers, and it was from a pastor in a rural church in Minnesota. The religious order, the family, and the town were identified in the newspaper article, but I am using this to illustrate a general principle and not to select out one particular group.

> *If the church hadn't planned to convert the refugees, we never would have bothered to bring this family to this particular town. We wanted to help them find Christ and the only way was to heaven. After all, it is eternity that counts. If they are going to hell, they might as well go to hell from Cambodia as from Minnesota. It would be wicked to just bring them over and feed and clothe them and let them go to hell. The God who made us wants them to be converted. If anyone thinks a gospel-preaching church would bring them over and not tell them about the Lord, they are out of their mind. These people at the sponsoring agency apparently make them feel that they should be living with their own people, which isn't right. It isn't good for them.*

The national headquarters of this church did not have this as a policy at the national or regional level, but at this particular church, it had become the practicing policy.

I think that this conference certainly is working toward alleviating some of the problems that I have talked about. We are becoming aware of how we can respect the home, culture and religion, and we are learning how as native-born Americans we can misinterpret refugees' behavior because of their cultural perspective. Hopefully, we will be able to leave this meeting with ideas on how to facilitate adjustment and acceptance of refugees and improve their mental health.

SOLUTION-ORIENTED STRATEGIES

☐ Ethnic Foster Care Program

Dr. Julianne Duncan
Program Development Caseworker
Seattle, Washington

Good morning. I became an anthropologist because I was doing child welfare work in the state system in Montana and dealt with many Native American children for various protective services and other case work issues. As I bumbled my good-hearted way around my case load, it became pretty clear to me that I did not know what I was doing. I was supposedly making decisions and giving advice to people who were more competent than I was at raising their own children. It was an uncharacteristic dose of humility, but, nevertheless, I thought that it would probably behoove me to learn a little bit more about the things that they were doing right in raising their children, rather than focusing on what they were not doing right – trying to correct it according to the norms of my own upbringing, which is essentially what we all have to draw on. That lead me into a search for understanding different kinds of family systems and different kinds of value systems, and this lead me into the field of anthropology.

Thus, I have been trying to look at these questions and understand them for quite some years now. The humility was needed to carry me through as I was working with Hmong families in Montana, where there were at that time many Hmong clans. That experience lead me overseas to work for UNHCR and IRC in the tracing program, primarily then with Cambodian children who had just left the clutches of Pol Pot and the terrible devastation of their culture.

I was in Southeast Asia with my own son, who was at the time eight years old and who did not do very well in the Thai village where we were living. I was supposedly an expert on helping other people help their children adjust to American life or to refugee camp life, and I wasn't having success with my own son. Things were going very badly for him. That, too, has been an important learning experience for me and has since become a positive learning experience for him.

I worked with Catholic Community Services in Tacoma, Washington. Now I am working with Lutheran Social Services in Seattle, where we have a fairly diverse program that includes Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodians.

Raising Infants to Healthy Adults

We are talking about solution-oriented strategies, and I am going to be discussing a program that has been relatively successful. I do not mean to imply that something somebody else is doing is not equally successful or good. I think that an approach that is useful is to frame the problem. What we are all here trying to do and trying to talk about is creating or raising healthy, functioning adults. If that is the goal that we are aiming for, and if we keep that ever in mind, what is it – how is it that we are going to go about doing this? That is the major task, I think, of all societies. If we talk about human universal values, I think that all societies are aiming to get infants raised to healthy adults. All societies, in all times, in all places, have managed to do this reasonably well. Americans tend to be very self-conscious about this; we are not sure about raising our children, and we stop and think a lot about what is the right way to do this.

What is the right way to incorporate refugee and immigrant children? Many of the refugee groups, as our keynote speaker has indicated, do not give much thought to child raising. It is something that has always worked well without a lot of thought. In a Cambodian village it was not necessary to stop and think, "Am I doing the right thing with my child?" People knew from their parents, they know from their grandparents, and they raised children right without thinking.

Refugees are now in a new culture and a new country. Some of the things that they have done have not always worked in their new setting, or the new setting itself contributes to some of the problems that they now experience. Nevertheless, I think that some of the things that we have learned as self-conscious Westerners, and some of the things that refugees know from grandparents and great-grandparents about the correct way to raise children, can be brought together to create situations in which children can thrive, or in which the children do not have some of the barriers that refugees and immigration can create for them.

Laotian refugee baby of the Hmong tribe living in the Ban Nam Yao camp in the Nan Province, Thailand.

Protecting Ethnic Identity

We know fairly clearly, and I think it is the sense of most people at this conference, that protecting an ethnic identity is crucial in raising healthy adults. People who feel good about their ethnic heritage function better at school, and later in the adult world. Just what the values are that create a Vietnamese person, or what the key values are of a Cambodian person or a Hmong person, we are not always sure. But we do know that people need to feel comfortable with whatever heritage they have. If they do not feel comfortable with their ethnic heritage, they are likely to be less than fully-functioning adults. Perhaps individuals with low self-esteem may be quite marginal, and in some cases, severely mentally ill.

Family and Cultural Systems

Solutions need to be devised specifically for the group you are targeting. Are you targeting children who are living with their natural families after migration? Are you targeting children who are living without their natural families? Unaccompanied minors? What ethnic group are you targeting? Are there differences between the boys and girls that you are trying to serve? Based on what I have heard the last couple of days, indeed, we are all devising different solutions for different ethnic groups; we are devising different solutions for boys and girls. In order to create whatever kind of program we want to create, we have to learn enough about the culture of our target group so that we can create a program that works with the values of that cultural group, rather than working against it. Teaching people how to use Western mental health techniques so that they can then be cured of migration-induced mental health problems is a long way around, although it can work. Perhaps there are things that we can find out from cultural groups that will give us some short cuts. How do Khmer raise their children? How do Vietnamese teach moral values? We need to find out for each group specifically how the family systems operate within that cultural group.

We can talk about a universal value of family, but what family means for Lao and for Vietnamese, as we heard from our keynote speaker, are very different things. What is the relationship between an individual and, particularly, an individual child and the family within which that child is being raised? Those things are different between ethnic groups, and different between Southeast Asian ethnic groups and American foster families, if you are placing children in American foster systems.

What are the roles in general within a cultural system? When you get down to an individual child, what are the roles within which that child is cast? The youngest child in a Vietnamese family has a very different role from the eldest child in a Vietnamese family. If you are dealing with a child who is exhibiting problems, you must know what position that child holds in the family and what the family roles are within families of that ethnic group. What is the cultural system? If we talk about family systems, I think we can understand that. We can understand that mothers and fathers impact each other. Children and parents impact each other in a systematic way.

What about cultural systems? Take this another step further. Ethnic groups living in their own country who haven't had to migrate are part of a cultural system that may include a mixture of ethnic groups, or it may include only one major ethnic group. Cambodians in Cambodia had to deal with other ethnic groups. However, they were the dominant cultural group in their area, and the entire cultural system was working together, rather than bits of it working against others. It evolved over centuries. All the aspects of the cultural system – the family, the economy, the religion, and the other cultural values – were working together to create adults who were able to function within that cultural system and to effectively continue raising the next generation. What is that cultural system? What are those values?

If we are going to try to create a program in the United States for people who are migrating from other cultural systems besides family systems, what are the other aspects of the cultural systems that we need to know about and to foster and recreate in order to raise children effectively in this new setting?

Also, what effect will migration have on the family system and on the cultural system? What is it in its native setting? What is going to happen once they get to Tacoma, Washington or once they get to Des Moines, Iowa or wherever they may end up? As programmers, as caseworkers, as foster parents, as parents, how do we learn these things?

Usually we cannot know all the family system and cultural information before people migrate. One of the reasons that this conference is so exciting is that in agency settings we are not often encouraged to look at religious values. We are often discouraged from doing that. However, religion is often the key to the cultural system. Religion creates the moral value of the ethnic group. And religion is created by each society to use in raising their children. It is a feedback loop. Religious values both reflect and mold the society of people who participate in the religion. We, as planners, as foster parents, and parents can consciously abstract and use the religious or other cultural values of a group of people. Once we understand the values, then we can teach the growing adults the culture of their background. I think we must keep in mind the goal of raising healthy adults.

Identifying Key Cultural Values

How do we identify the key cultural values of a group of people? Ask the religious leaders, if they are available. I have certainly been fortunate to have access to Cambodian Brahmanic religious leaders, the Kru Khmer, and the other traditional healers. Vietnamese Buddhist monks and Vietnamese Catholic priests are happy to talk to us about what is the ideal adult in their society. Sometimes they cannot tell you concretely how one goes about raising children; that is usually not their job. But they can at least tell you what an ideal adult is. You then have an idea what it is that the children have been programmed for until they come into your care.

If you have families, at least then you probably have some adults with you. Younger adults are often not the culture bearers. They are young, they have to work, they have been in refugee camps, they may not know the nuances of their culture. We have to ask the elders. The immigrant groups who have managed to bring some of their elders to the United States I think are most fortunate. I think that the Cambodians with whom I have worked in Washington state are fortunate to have many elders with them. The elders are not necessarily well-educated. In fact, usually they are not, but the elders have lived a long time and they know their culture. The elders are the ones who are repositories of cultural wisdom, and they have time to think about values. They do not have to work. They do not have to get a job at K-Mart or clean the Hilton Hotel. They have time to sit at the end of the Wat and talk during the day, and they have time to talk to those of us who are willing to talk to them. They have time to talk to their children. They have time to tell stories, and they have time to make special food and do all the things that children need to feel loved and nurtured.

It is my observation that Vietnamese are at a disadvantage because in many cases the elders have not been physically able to make the escape. Therefore, many families are here without their grandparents. The children who grow up in families without grandparents, as well as the parents, often feel that loss very deeply. People are in contact by letter or by phone, but it is not the same thing as having grandma at home when the kids come home from school. And it is not the same thing as being able to go back and ask your mother questions about how to take care of the kids. Vietnamese that I have talked to feel this loss deeply. The same thing is true for many of the Chinese from Vietnam. In many cases, the elders have not been able to come to the United States, and the communities feel this loss deeply.

There are some elders here from all ethnic groups, and those of us who are in the business of raising children really need to use them. If they do not speak English, find somebody who can help you talk to them. Find a child who can help you talk to them. Do not expect the child to be the repository of cultural knowledge, but have the child help you talk to the elders and learn what you need to know. If you have staff members in your offices of the ethnic groups that you are trying to reach, use those staff members who have spent a lot of time learning English and getting around in the United States to learn everything about Vietnamese or Cambodian or Hmong culture. Encourage them to get information from their elders to bring into your programs.

One of the more exciting experiences that I have had in the last couple of years was meeting with Hmong elders, clan leaders, and shamans in Spokane, Washington, when I was working for the refugee mental health project, and incorporating some of their advice into a mental health project that targets Hmong in Spokane. The questions they addressed were: Would they advise the mental health center to proceed? How would they advise their younger clan members who would ultimately be the workers in this mental health system? It was exciting and dynamic for me. I learned a lot, probably more than they did. That program is now functioning fairly well in a low-key way, but the elders are on board. They are interested in what is happening, and they have given their advice and are helping the younger members carry out the work that they must do. They are not the paid staff members. The director of the mental health center doesn't know them well. But they are there and they are functioning. We have to use the elders and religious leaders. We must use the cultural system to devise what it is that is correct for raising children.

A Successful Foster Care Program

The program that I am going to talk about is a program that I devised when I returned from Southeast Asia and moved to the Northwest, because I knew that Cambodian children would be entering the U.S. and that most programs here had dealt primarily with Vietnamese and Chinese youth. The cultural differences are great. We decided to select Cambodian families already resettled in the area. They were ideal foster parents. We were targeting adolescent children who were coming from refugee camps and who had survived the mobile teams of the Pol Pot Regime, whose parents had been killed, who had watched their teachers and monks killed. Cambodian refugee families were going to be quite capable of understanding what those children had suffered. They were quite capable of nurturing them and feeding them and loving them. They were capable of providing those children with a sense of family and a sense of home. So we set about recruiting and licensing Cambodian families.

The first group had twenty-five kids. The program now has forty-five kids. There were plenty of Cambodian people who were capable of and interested in foster families. We tried to target older people who had some experience raising children. In many cases with the Cambodian population, there are lots of families who have lost children – people who lost all their children, grandparents who have lost their grandchildren. Those people really wanted to have children in their homes. And so we were meeting a need for those elders, as well.

Importance of the Religious Context

It is not enough only to place children in Cambodian families. You have to have the context. What were the things that these families depended on when they were in Cambodia to help them raise their children? As program planners, what can we provide that helps the refugee families raise children? In the case of Cambodians in Cambodia before the war, what did people do when they had trouble with a child? Invariably, they went to the Buddhist monks. If a youth were troubled, the family would take the child to the Wat. The monks would talk to him, counsel him, and gradually bring him back into correct moral behavior – into harmony with himself, ultimately into harmony with his family, and into harmony with his entire village or society. The religious context was creating harmonious individuals. There are specific religious services for doing this. If a person is experiencing maladjustment, there are specific times that one can go to the temple and the monks will do a blessing, or a very short ritual to recreate good luck. You can talk about it as recreating good luck, even if a person is experiencing difficulties in school or work. Part of bad luck has to do with an unharmonious life. Go to the temple or bring the monk to the home and carry out the ceremonies as necessary to create harmony for the family.

Older children who have come into our care – whether they are Vietnamese, Hmong, or Cambodian, whether they are with their families or without their families – have experienced massive loss and massive separation from loved ones. And they have experienced culture loss. I am talking about Cambodian Buddhist religious ceremonies, but there are clearly such ceremonies for the Vietnamese Catholic children I am dealing with, as well as for the Vietnamese Buddhist children. Create religious ceremonies fairly early on after arrival. It helps the child make a ritual transition from home society or refugee camp society to American society. For a Vietnamese Catholic youth it is comforting to be able to go down to the church and light candles to the Virgin Mary because he knows his mother goes to mass every day in Saigon. A Vietnamese child who I deal with was experiencing great trauma. Once he was able to get into the Catholic church and light these candles every day, he really was able to let go of a lot of grief. These are religious ceremonies that are already there; we do not have to invent them.

For the Cambodian children, we had a ceremony in their home called Ban Skol. It is a ceremony in which the Buddhist monk comes to a home – in this case, the foster home. The Cambodian foster family made the food, created the ritual artifacts, set up the house. It is a ceremony in which the children are able, with the assistance of the program staff and their foster families, to carry out a ritual for their parents. In most cases these parents are dead. In some cases they are missing. But the children are able to get in touch with the spirits of their families, essentially to let their folks know where they are and what they are doing, and to get permission from their families to thrive in the new life. Someone talked yesterday in our small group about the kind of nightmare that children experience, and I think all of you who deal with children, whether they are in their natural families or in foster families, realize that kind of nightmare and the kind of unsettled life that the children experience. Before the ceremonies were conducted, most of the Cambodian children did experience severe nightmares. Some were less severe, but nevertheless, they saw a lot of dreams in which their grandmother or other family members would be walking past and they would be waving to them from their bike. Their grandmother wouldn't look at them or looked right past like they weren't really people. After they have an opportunity to participate in this ceremony, they have dreams in which the grandmother did look at them, recognize them, and knew where they were.

Using Cultural Tools

The Ban Skol ceremony could not solve everything, but it is a tool that the culture already provides. We didn't have to invent a new tool. There are other tools for the people to use to deal with specific kinds of problems. Americans would more ordinarily deal with these problems through various kinds of counseling which are effective, as well, and should not be dismissed; I think we want to use whatever tool we can. But I would like to think as much as possible: What are the tools that a group of people has always used? Vietnamese people have been raising children for a long time. What are the tools that they use to deal with these problems? And a foster family—a Vietnamese foster family by themselves may not think about it. They may not really think, "Oh I want to take the child down to light candles for his mother." But, given advice from the priests, given advice from other leaders in the community, we can think of these solutions. We have to ask everybody and try whatever we can. For the Cambodian children, the Buddhist religious personnel are key in giving the families the assistance they need.

For most of the Southeast Asian cultures, it is not acceptable to directly confront and talk to parents about what is bothering them. And so we as case workers, we as resettlement workers, we as religious personnel, are the "cut out". Any of us who are dealing with therapists must make sure that the therapist understands this role, because therapists trained in the U.S. tend to think of trying to facilitate direct communication between youth and parents. This is not usually effective, and the clients—both the parent and the child— may often think of the therapist as the negotiator. Americans can do that as well; it doesn't necessarily have to be a Cambodian or a Vietnamese, although because of language and other subtle cultural things, it is easier when the case workers are of the same culture.

Using Traditional Healers

We have to recognize subtle cultural symbols and do the best we can to be sensitive to them. Sometimes, the Buddhist religious personnel, the family system within which we integrated the children, and the basic casework services were still not enough to resolve the incredible trauma that many of the Cambodian children had experienced. I am fortunate enough to be working in an area in which there is a rich group of traditional healers. Most of you who are working in Cambodian communities – if you work through Cambodian adults in your community – can begin to find those people. In Cambodia they are called Kru Khmer. That means Khmer teacher. Kru Khmer work in the Brahmanic system. It is a parallel system with Buddhism. It isn't the same as Buddhism and it is not antagonistic to Buddhism. The Kru Khmer are often also Buddhists. Some Buddhists monks are also Kru Khmer, but they are not the same thing.

Kru Khmer are people who have the ability to understand spirits. Their role is somewhat comparable to the Hmong shamans, to the shamans in the Mien group. The Kru Khmer are the people who can identify what is happening and what is bothering a child, if a child is experiencing greater difficulties than we can overcome through the ordinary means of the religious services and foster homes. If a ghost is bothering a child and making it impossible for that child to function, the Kru Khmer can identify what kind of ghost it is, what kind of spirit it is, and then give the child the tools necessary to resolve the problem. Kru Khmer will never say "no" to any help that a child asks. And in our case, we as the agency set up the healing ceremony. Sometimes it took place at the Kru Khmer's house; sometimes it took place at the home of the child, and we carried out whatever was necessary to help the child be healed.

I recently took a boy from Seattle to Tacoma because there is an extremely powerful woman spirit medium there who was able to help him contact the spirit of his father. His father's spirit became his helper at school and held him back when he was going to get into fights, when people taunted him racially. By no means are all his fighting problems solved, but nevertheless, he has more strength to deal with that when he has his father helping him than when he has to do it alone.

A Summer Camp Program

I think that our next speaker, Sopha, is going to talk about something else that is crucial that we did with the Cambodian children. It is called the Khmer Studies Institute. We took all of the Cambodian children for one week to camp, and at camp we spent the majority of our time giving them information about Cambodian history, geography, and literature. We had a session on marriage customs. We had Buddhist monks who were there to instruct in Buddhism. In addition, we offered a lot of sports and Cambodian popular music. We were able to say that, within the boundaries here, we are in Cambodia.

We are able to do this on a smaller scale with Vietnamese and Chinese youths whom I am dealing with right now at Lutheran Social Services during spring break. We had a four-day retreat in an area where we could pick a lot of oysters and cook our food. We had a Vietnamese musician who is a professor at the University of Washington, who had not attracted very many Vietnamese students but had a lot of American students. He is a high status person, a professor at the University who can come and talk to these kids about the beauty of some to the fishing songs in Vietnamese villages, and about how he had American students come try to learn these things. He gave them a sense that, indeed, they didn't need to only run to electrical engineering. There were things that they already knew that were very good and that other people wanted to know. He gave children a certain amount of strength and a certain amount of sense of their own identity.

My time is finished. I will stop and we can talk later.

☐ Working with Foster Parents: Preservation of Religious Heritage

Sopha Hang
Multi-Cultural Social Worker
Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program
Lutheran Family Service of Oregon and Southwest Washington
Portland, Oregon

Hello. I am Sopha and I arrived in the U.S. in 1976. I went to junior high, high school, and college in the U.S. I feel that I have an "edge" with the kids that I am working with because I have grown up here and experienced many of the same problems and challenges. I can relate to them and some of the pressure that they are going through dealing with school, problems at home, problems they run into.

Foster Care and Religious Practices

I would like to share with you today my experiences working with foster parents and Cambodian children. (I have two Amerasian cases and eight Cambodian cases.) When there is a problem in a home regarding religious practice, I have to be very careful, very sensitive to both sides, to both the youth and the foster parents.

Let's say that there is a problem and the child tells me, "I don't want to go to church. Why do they keep asking me to go?" I will then go to the foster parent and ask, "Why does so-and-so have to go to church?" The foster parent sometimes replies, "Well, we asked him and he said, 'yes.'" I then go back to the child and repeat this. The child will say, "Well, I said 'yes' because I feel out of respect that I should go to their church. Or I am afraid that they might kick me out and no longer want me in the home if I say 'no.' So I am hoping you will help me explain to them how I feel, that I would like to keep my parents' religion."

Most of the Cambodian children are Buddhist, so I explain to the foster parents that this child has expressed a desire to keep his or her own religion. If I see the foster parent is pressuring the child to go, I would go on and elaborate a little bit more about religion and ask a foster parent to respect the biological parents and to keep the religion for them. I also explain to the child the thinking behind wanting that particular child to go to church. Maybe there is a need to "save" someone. Some religious people feel the need to "save" a child because they do not see this child having a regular practice.

I explain about Buddhism to the foster parent. We don't have a regular practice, on a Sunday or Saturday. You go to the temple when you feel you want to, when you feel you want to mourn, or when you feel you want to pray. It is out of your heart that you want to go. If you feel that on certain days you would like to pray, you go. By not seeing regular practice, the foster parent may think that the children are not thinking seriously about Buddhism.

Sometimes the foster parent will take a child to church because they do not want to leave the child behind by himself. I suggest that the child could have his tutoring lesson then. Perhaps the child can accompany the foster parent to church and sit in another room and do homework.

Tips for Orientation Sessions

We try hard in the beginning at the orientation to let foster parents know that we like to respect the biological parents by not imposing any religious belief on the child. We try to help the foster parent encourage the child to keep his or her own religion. If I know that the child is a Buddhist and a very active one, I place them on the Cambodian Buddhist Society mailing lists, with the foster parents' permission. Just over the weekend we had a big Memorial Day celebration, and I saw some of my kids there and I am glad that they are there. During the new year we take them to the temple to be blessed by the monks. Every situation is different. You have to take them one by one. That is my approach, though it may not be appropriate to certain situations.

A Summer Camp Program

I would like to also talk about camp living. Camp is an annual activity that we put on for the Cambodian children and the Vietnamese. The camp started in 1983 and it lasts for about a week. The monks come and open the camp and close the camp, and I make all my kids speak Cambodian during that week. If I run into them, I give them points if they speak Cambodian. I subtract points if they speak English. They get something in the end for not speaking English during the time at camp. We encourage activities such as Cambodian games. Some teachers tell stories, and the monks teach about old stories. The kids learn a lot.

This year, we saw an improvement in the kids, too. In 1983, when we put up the list for dish washing time, we had to go out and scout for them. Some of them would be hiding in the bathroom, some in the cabin, some way out in the soccer field. This year, when we announced whose turn it was to do the dishes, we didn't have any problems at all. The kids just went in and attacked the dishes so they could go out and play soccer, volleyball, and badminton and enjoy themselves. When it is time to clean up the camp, they still moan and groan, but we didn't have to go out of our way to scout them. This is something they can learn spiritually by going to camp and seeing other kids doing it at the same time.

Thank you for your attention.

☐ Summer Camp Program for Southeast Asian Refugee Children

Nguyen Bachyen
Unaccompanied and Accompanied Minors Program
Catholic Charities
St. Paul, Minnesota

Good Morning! At first, I have to say "thank you" to Dr. Danieli because she is the one who recommended that I come here to share my project with you. I work in Catholic Charities with Vietnamese accompanied and unaccompanied minors. I was a nurse/midwife in Vietnam before I came to this country. When I came to the U.S., I pursued training for an R.N., but I was not satisfied. I wanted to use my experiences as a refugee in this country with my expertise to help refugees deal with life in a new culture. I began to work with the Vietnamese as an outreach worker for a mental health program. However, I was concerned with the children who came to the U.S. without families and had to adjust to a new culture and language. I know that as an adult I struggled; how much worse it must be for the children!

My understanding of the word "spiritual" is self-awareness. What is your heritage and your culture? What did you pick up from where you came from? Most of the kids I am working with, the Vietnamese unaccompanied refugee minors, are placed in American foster homes. The children do have a hard time and are often confused about things they like to do, and have questions such as, "Can I practice my religion in the home where I am staying?" This concerns them and sometimes disturbs their foster family.

A Summer Camp Experience

We help the kids learn about and accept other religions in the summer camps, which are held each year from August 29 through September 1st. One of the boys in my caseload was a strong traditional practicing Catholic, and he did not accept Buddhism at all. Half of the group is Catholic and half the group is Buddhist, and a few of them are Lutheran. I invited the Vietnamese Buddhist monk to come and talk to 35 of the unaccompanied minors on Buddhist and Vietnamese culture. After the talk from the Buddhist monk, the youth had the opportunity to talk to the monk. He asked me, "Do you think you can talk to my foster mother, who is a traditional Catholic, and tell her what the Buddhist monk said? I feel so funny because my foster mother and my birth mother will not accept Buddhism. You know, one thing I learned from him was that he accepted the Catholic traditions the same as the Buddhist."

We also have the youth do exercises to encourage them to think about their future. Do they want to keep their identity or become American and still keep their Vietnamese heritage? How do they carry that out?

Next month, we have a reunion party for the children and the families in order to encourage and support both parents and children working together. We work with Dr. Nguyen Trung Hieu, who has been involved with a lot of orphaned children in Vietnam since 1963. He is still working with the Vietnamese youngsters to help them to deal with the differences from both cultures and heritage. All of the volunteer interns are from the University of Minnesota. A senior team leader is appointed to work with the group. Each group has to vote on who will be the one to record and report all the ideas expressed at this gathering. On the last day, they reflect on and make recommendations for the future camp sessions. Each group chooses a representative from the male and the female group to be a communicator for their groups and plan for the camp sessions the following year.

We have learned from these "wrap-up sessions" that the topic we haven't talked about enough is maintaining our cultural identity in a new society—also, the issue of the trauma of being a refugee and the stresses inherent in resettling in a new culture. The time is limited. If later you want to see the tape, we can share it with you. I will be glad to help you answer some of your questions and take this opportunity to share with you some of the ideas we have to help with the youngsters who came here, and to do things with them to work toward the future and make their lives better and more contributing to this society. Thank you.

☐ Preserving the Spiritual and Cultural Heritage of Amerasian and Southeast Asian Families

Rosemarie Battisti
Executive Director
Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees
Utica, New York

The experiences that I bring to you today are from one program in a medium-sized city of 76,000 people in upstate New York. The refugee center has been there for nine years. Before that, the only Asian people were Chinese or Korean doctors, so we really did not have an Asian population as a base to start with. Originally we fumbled, but we are making progress now.

One of the frustrations in the type of program I have is that most of my funding comes from state programs which require us to place emphasis on the hardcore services of English and employment. So we have to be really creative sometimes to try to meet the non-material needs of our refugees.

One of the ways we have been able to do that recently is though a youth employment program that has been funded by REAP through the State of New York Refugee Program from federal funding. We have been able to kind of "back door" into an activity session every week for our refugee youth. This program was designed basically to meet the needs of Amerasian refugees although it is open to any refugee youth, ages 16 to 21.

The main emphasis again is on English as a Second Language and on employment skills, but through a cultural orientation segment we have been able to really show the young people that we value and respect their traditions and culture. We have been able not only to teach them about American culture but to have them teach us and my staff, the rest of us, about their own culture. I think that this has worked and has given them a real sense of pride in who they are and the realization that we want to learn more from them instead of us always teaching them about our culture.

Utica's Religious Setting

In terms of the religious needs, in our area we are not fortunate enough to have any Vietnamese Catholic priests or any Buddhist Monks. We have one Buddhist nun who came to this country with her two adopted Amerasian daughters. When we get a real tough case, for example, a young girl who needs a lot of guidance, we try to settle her family in the same apartment building with this Buddhist nun. She has been very cooperative and helpful to us in her quiet way.

The Vietnamese Catholic community in Utica has not had as much trouble in preserving their traditions as has the Buddhist community because the Catholic churches in our area have been very warm and welcoming. Several times a year, we have a Catholic Vietnamese priest come to Utica, say mass, hear confessions, spend the weekend with us, and share meals with us. That has been very comforting to the Vietnamese Catholics in our area. I think that we really fall back on our religious beliefs in times of great joy or sorrow.

Preserving Culture and Religious Traditions

About a year and a half ago, we experienced the death of a Cambodian elder. This was the first death in the community since I was director of the agency, so we went to the house, of course, to be with the family. I wasn't really sure about how to handle things. Our Cambodian community is very small, and we weren't able to bring a monk in to do the services, so we went to an American funeral parlor in the inner city of Utica to discuss things with the funeral director. I just cannot say enough about how cooperative this man was. He never before had had to deal with Asian customs and he really didn't know what to expect. But he said, "Rosemarie, you do whatever you have to do. Any way we can be helpful, we will be there for you. Just take as much time as you need with the family, have whatever rituals you need to have done, go ahead and we will help you as much as we can." We had the Buddha brought in and the incense and the candles and those were no problems.

But then the Cambodian foster son said to me, "Rosemarie, my mom really needs to be in the room with my dad and be able to put special water in his mouth to cleanse any harsh words that had been said before he continues out his journey. Do you think we can do this?" I didn't know how the undertakers were going to feel about that, but they were wonderful and we were able to do it.

The undertakers prepared the body. The foster son, the mother, and myself then went into the room. It was cold in there, all white and steel-lined. It was just one of the most intense experiences that I have ever been involved with.

The undertaker stood next to me to witness and share in this beautiful ceremony. The foster son began to chant. The mother poured the special water into her husband's mouth and continued to chant with the son. We were only there a few minutes. It was very simple, it wasn't anything complex, and it didn't take a lot of time.

But you could just see the relief in this woman. She really needed to do this to be able to deal with the loss of her husband. You could just see the peace that came over her as she performed this ritual for her husband. It was something that she thought she wasn't going to be able to do. I think if we ask people in the community to help us when we have these special needs, we find most of the time that they are very cooperative and understanding. It pays to ask because you never know it is going to happen until you do it, and most of the time you are pleasantly surprised.

Another situation we had was when a Vietnamese elderly woman died. She was like the grandmother of the whole community. She had open-heart surgery when she came to the U.S. and was doing very well, recovering at the home of another Amerasian family. But then she died suddenly. I had to go up to school, pick up her 18-year-old son and tell him that his mother had died and he was in this country all by himself. It was very difficult to do. As we were driving from the school to the house, I had to tell him and we spent some time talking about it.

I anticipated going into the apartment and finding just one other Amerasian mother waiting for us. But I walked into that apartment, and it was full of the Amerasian and the Vietnamese community. They had all gathered – I do not know how word got out so fast, but they were all there by the time I got there with this boy.

They were so supportive. There was a sewing machine on the floor, and the women were sewing from sheets the white mourning garment for this boy to wear. They just rallied around this young man. It was amazing to see. People were on the telephone gathering money, and we were able to get a monk to come up to do the services in this particular case. We went back to the same funeral director – he knows us well now – and he said the same thing: he would help with anything that we needed.

The next day we went for calling hours, and the Amerasian Vietnamese community had gathered again at the funeral home. It was tremendous to see the outpouring of love and respect for this woman. During that one afternoon of visiting hours, the monk was there and the community was doing the chants and the son was sitting up in front.

Now this is an Amerasian young fellow doing fairly well in school, long hair down to his shoulders. The "Joe Cool" type, as the kids say – he was sitting in the front of the casket wearing his mourning garment and carrying a staff, which is traditional. I saw his peers start coming in from school and didn't know what their reaction was going to be. All of these young Amerasian boys and girls who usually are not real quiet were so reverent and supportive of their friend, it was amazing. There was not a giggle. There was not one comment. They just sat by him and shared with him. I was so proud of all my kids that day because they really rose to the occasion.

During the rest of that afternoon, some Sisters from the Catholic church came and said prayers. A Protestant minister was there, and he said prayers. And the Buddhist monk there did his prayers too. So, what a send-off this lady had; she had it all. It was just wonderful to see the community rally around.

Because we don't have a lot of community leaders in our small community, we rely heavily on my Vietnamese staff to guide us in proper rituals. They tied pieces of red cloth to the car antennas on the way to the burial. In Vietnam, they would have carried the casket past the woman's house and through her neighborhood. Since we couldn't do that, we drove past the house and the neighborhood. These are all small and easy things to do that really helped in preserving the culture and religious traditions of the refugees in Utica. It has been an enormous learning experience for me, also, and I am grateful to the refugees that they have allowed me to share in their lives in this way.

That is one of the benefits of being in a small community. There are many things we lack in a small community. But there are some advantages to clustering refugees, especially the Amerasian population, in small communities. One of these is that our staff has been able to become the extended family that the Amerasians don't have.

One of the funniest things in my office is that my father is one of my job developers, and so I still call him "Dad" – and the Vietnamese call him "Daddy". It is funny when my staff answers the telephone – "Hey Daddy, it's for you!" I wonder sometimes what they are thinking on the other end.

We have been able to take, for example, respect, which is a strength of the Asians for parents, the elderly, teachers and authority and use that to enhance resettlement. My staff, who are marvelous and tremendously dedicated, call each other not by their first names but by their Vietnamese titles. We have just hired a new woman, and my administrative assistant calls her "Aunt".

I think it is wonderful for the Amerasian young people to see this and to see that this respect is valued. It is not anything that is loud or flashy. It's just the way we operate, and I think that they can absorb this and feel how much we value them. This is a personal example, and I didn't know if I was going to do this when I first came; but I just feel that I am among friends and that I can share this with you.

As an Adoptive Mother

In addition to my work as a refugee service person, I have eight children. Four of them are adopted from Korea. There is always a lot of activity in our house. Jimmy – my oldest child – was 7 then. He was fighting with his five-year-old brother. Since it was time for bed, I said, "That's it guys; you're going to bed," and I sent them upstairs.

Jimmy was so mad at me that he got in his bed without taking his clothing off. Standing there exasperated, I said "Come on, let's get in our pajamas." He took off his socks and threw them at me. I said, "What do you want?" and he said, "I want my mother." "I am right here," I said. But he said, "No, I want my Korean mother."

He had been mine since he was three months old; I was devastated. I went in to sit down and he started to cry. "Mommy," he cried, "She didn't even give me a chance." "You know she must have loved you very much," I said, "To realize she couldn't care for you and give you to another family." "But Mommy," he said. "I don't even speak Korean anymore. If I find her I can't talk to her."

I didn't know what to say for the pain in this little boy. I prayed fast and hard, "God, this is it you know; you've got to help me here." I really didn't know what to say, but I looked at this little boy that I loved so much and said, "But Jimmy, you know I love you too." He sat right up in bed. "Do you?" he asked. "And do you love her?" "Of course I love her," I told him. "You're a part of her and I love you so much that of course Daddy and I love her."

He stopped crying and settled down. It just wasn't me; it was God helping me know what to say. Jimmy settled right down, and I realized afterwards what he needed to hear. He needed to hear acceptance of where he is from and whom he is.

I think that this is related to our work with refugees, especially with our Amerasian refugees. We need to tell them, honestly, "You're important to us. Welcome home." Those are ways that we can make their adjustment easier. They've lost so much, and we can't change that. But now they're *home and they belong here and we welcome them. I think that has value to it, and where they came from it is really important.*

Empowering the Refugees

I was at a conference on Unaccompanied Refugee Minors in Cape Cod a few weeks ago, and we were talking about advocacy. One of the men there said as refugee workers, part of our job is to empower the refugees. I think that in this respect, teenagers, especially, know if you're sincere or not sincere. When they know that we sincerely value them and we sincerely care about their well-being, then that's a type of empowerment. Then we can have kids like Ahn, whom I am so proud of, go out and share his experience with other people so that they can realize what kind of life these kids have had and how they're eager to do well here. That's empowerment that is also important in terms of cultural identity and religious identity.

These are some of the simple things that we can do to help shape our young people and to help them realize how important they are to all of us.

☐ Integrating Buddhist Traditions in a Mental Health Facility

Dr. Florentius Chan
Los Angeles, California

Let me tell you a little about my background. I am not a Southeast Asian refugee. I am Chinese, born and raised in Hong Kong. I earned my B.S in Montreal, and my Ph.D. in Virginia. I went to San Francisco and did my post-doctoral work at the University of California at San Francisco. From there I went to Los Angeles and developed the Long Beach Mental Health Program. Long Beach is twenty-five miles south of Los Angeles and has a growing Southeast Asian refugee population. There are an estimated 35,000 Cambodian refugees living there, the largest Cambodian population besides Phnom-Penh, in Cambodia. There are also about 10,000 Vietnamese, about 5,000 Lao and Hmong.

Our program started a few years ago with the help of the community leaders, because of the growing concerns about the mental health needs among the refugee population. We all knew that the majority of the refugee population are depressed, and thus we developed this program. We have a multi-disciplinary team. We have a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a clinical social worker, and community workers. Currently, we have about 350 refugee patients, probably the largest number of refugee mentally ill clients in the nation. We deal mostly with the adults because the program is funded for adults, although we do treat children. Among the 350 cases, we have about 70% Cambodian, 15% Lao, and 10% Vietnamese, which represents the population in the Long Beach area. We also have an elderly socialization project which is being held at the temples.

Specific Problems of Children

Before I talk more about the program, I will talk a little about the problems among children. As you know, the problems presented by adults are quite different from the children's problems. The adults usually present depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, the symptoms of which include startle reactions, nightmares and recurrent thoughts of the past events. With children, we see mostly identity and behavioral problems. I heard a lot of comments yesterday about the American cultures and the media advocating the materialistic needs, and their impact on the children. One of the major reasons for children developing these behavioral and identity problems is that for the last many years before they came to the U.S., they have gone through war and the camp experiences, which have led them to develop a sense of insecurity, instability, and distrust. So when they come here, they have the identity problem. Who are they? Are they Asian? Are they Asian-American? Are they American-Asian? Or are they American? So they have a problem identifying themselves among their peers and their family members.

Also, I want to touch upon a role complex. When they are back in Cambodia and Vietnam, the role of every individual family member is well-defined. The father is the breadwinner. He goes out to work hard to bring home food. The mother takes care of the children, and the children respect the parents. The roles change in the U.S. due to cultural and psychological factors. If the father has not been killed in the war, he is busy working a number of jobs. He may be physically ill or mentally depressed. The role of the children is not well-defined. They are children because of their language skills. Many of them speak English well. They provide assistance to parents with medical problems. They bring the parents to see a doctor, and often they are caretakers for their parents, as well as for the younger children. We see tremendous stress among the eldest daughters, and they present a lot of problems. A couple of months ago, in a period of two weeks, we had three attempted suicide cases among eldest daughters. So you can see that because of the role conflict and the identity problems, the children are likely to develop some behavioral problems. That is what I am seeing in the clinic.

Development of the Program: Strong Community Support

I spoke to some of the individuals, and they are quite concerned about the use of mental health services, because it is a taboo subject for Asians–Southeast Asians, particularly. They want to know how we attract so many clients in our clinic and how the communities perceive mental health. In general, most of the Asians see it as black and white. Either you are crazy or you are not crazy. They don't see it as a continuum, that mental health ranges from mild depression to severe psychosis that needs hospitalization.

When we started this program, I had similar concerns. So I developed a very strong community base of the advisory board. This consists of many community leaders. Our board members include people from the police department, social welfare department, rehabilitation departments, Catholic Charities services and other church groups. These leaders are the gatekeepers of the community. Marketing the mental health services to Asian or Southeast Asian refugees is different from marketing a restaurant business. We need community support, and that is why we work closely with the community leaders. When we started this program, the community leaders were asked to tell the public that this is a good program. We speak the language and we have people who are sensitive to the populations and we have good doctors.

The unique characteristic of this program is that we have a Buddhist monk, probably the only Buddhist monk working in the county system or public service. We had a lot of controversy when I hired a Buddhist monk, because Buddhist monks aren't supposed to work; they are supposed to stay in the temple. They cannot conceive of a Buddhist monk carrying a brief case and going to work from nine to five. It is totally foreign to them. Our Buddhist monk, Reverend Kong Chhean, is quite unique in his background. He was trained in India. He received his doctoral degree in religion and came to the U.S. about eight years ago, then received his Masters degree in psychology at Pepperdine University. He is working on his license on marriage, family, and child counseling. When I started this program three years ago, I did a nationwide search for Cambodian and Lao social workers or mental health professionals. I didn't have any luck at all. I could find some Vietnamese social workers and nurses. We have some Cambodian and Lao community workers. These community workers serve as case managers and translators.

Introducing Buddhist Traditions in Treatment

Our Buddhist monk, Reverend Kong Chhean, is probably the only person in this country who has the highest credentials in the mental health field. He is also a community leader. In Cambodia when people have either mental or family problems, they usually go to the Buddhist monk; they don't have mental health clinics or psychologists or psychiatrists.

When we started this program, we thought that if we have a Buddhist monk working in the clinic, the people may feel safe. They believe that people who work with the Buddhist monk are good people. That is how we recruit our clients because a lot of people are skeptical about going to a mental health clinic. Most of the psychotropic medications have side effects. Nobody would like to take medication because of the strong side effects. But with the Buddhist monks, people feel safe receiving psychiatric treatment. Thus, we decided to get him involved as a behavioral consultant working on a part-time basis to see how the community reacted, and it turned out to be good.

He is working full-time with us now. He is basically bridging the gaps between Eastern and Western philosophy, as well as the methods of healing. He integrates Buddhist principles into the psychotherapy. He teaches adults and children about the Buddhist principles. For example, he talks about non-materialistic needs. He points out that Buddha doesn't need money, Buddha doesn't need private property; Buddha only needs community property. This is very important to the youngsters because the media usually presents the capitalistic image in our society.

A Case Example

I don't have time to go in to depth on how Reverend Kong Chhean does therapy, but I just want to give you one case example of how he works with the youngsters. A Buddhist monk has the highest rank in Cambodia besides the King. When people see Buddhist monks, they have to kneel down and bow. They display their entire respect for the Buddhist monks. We have one case of a sixteen-year-old Cambodian high school girl who was brought to our clinic by the school principal and the school nurse at about four or five o'clock because she wrote a ten-page suicide note to her peers. When students give their locker combination to their friends on their suicide note, it is usually a serious suicide gesture. We wanted to hospitalize the patient, but it was very hard to find an adolescent bed that time in the evening. I tried to ask her if she would promise not to kill herself because I am obligated to keep her until she promises not to hurt herself. She didn't want to make that promise. So we were stuck at five o'clock in the evening, and there was nothing we could do about it.

Thus, I asked the Buddhist monk, Reverend Kong Chhean, to talk to the student. When the student saw him, she immediately knelt down and bowed to him. Reverend Kong Chhean asked her not to hurt herself. At the beginning she was reluctant, but later on she did comply.

You can see how important it was to involve the Buddhist in that particular situation. I drove her with the Buddhist monk to the pharmacy to get the medication and brought her home. She was living with her foster aunt and had problems with her foster aunt's children. The patient requested that we not talk to her aunt about what had happened that day. When we went to her home, it was almost eight o'clock in the evening. So the Buddhist monk told her aunt not to ask the patient anything and we would pick her up the next morning and bring her back to the clinic. So the aunt complied. She didn't say anything to the patient because she knew that when the patient comes home at eight o'clock with us, there must be something happening. If she asks the patient, it will place more stress on the patient. The next day we took her to our clinic and provided counseling to her and her aunt.

However, she could not get along with the foster aunt's children, so later on she left home and stayed in the temple. She went to school in the day time and came back to live in the temple. Her behavior improved significantly. I saw her last weekend in the Buddhist memorial ceremony. She was helping out with cleaning the dishes. A Buddhist temple can provide the non-materialistic needs for the Cambodian families and children. Reverend Kong Chhean is building a temple to serve the community, as well as a Sunday school and playground for the children.

In conclusion, the non-materialistic needs are very important for young people because of the trauma they have gone through and their identity problems. The Buddhist monks and the people who go to the temple serve as a role model to the children. I want to emphasize that when working with the Southeast Asian children, it is very different from working with the typical "Anglo" or American child. When the Asian children have problems, their parents usually have problems, also. Thus, we have to work with their families and the community. Thank you.

Vietnamese refugees in detention area of Phnom Phen.

☐ An Intergenerational Program Designed for Holocaust Survivors and Their Children

Dr. Yael Danieli
Director
Group Projects for Holocaust Survivors and Their Children
New York, New York

I have travelled through five continents. A multi-cultural perspective has been mine from birth. I've been touched very deeply by my work with survivors of the Holocaust, contributions to treatment of the Aborigines in Australia, and earthquake victims and survivors of other dramatically terrible events. Hopefully, I help, and, hopefully, I do a little bit to make the world a better place. This ultimately propels me. I want to share with you the actual feeling that propels me in my work—whether it's my own project because I built it, or other projects because I hear of them or I'm in some way connected to them. These are the words of Eli Wiesel:

> *After the reckoning, one feels discouragement and shame. The balance sheet is disheartening. Society has changed so little that only one conclusion is possible. Mainly, the failure of the black years has begotten yet another failure. Nothing has been learned. Auschwitz is not even served as a warning.*

Now that's from the perpetrator's point of view. I'm quite determined in light of my life that from the service-providing point of view and from the lessons we can learn as human beings from what evil does, we can make the world a better place.

> *The sun made a desperate effort to shine on the last day of May in 1944. The sun is warming in May. It heals. But even the heavens were helpless on that day. A force so evil ruled heaven and earth that it altered the natural order of the universe. And the heart of my mother was floating in the smoke-filled sky of Auschwitz. I have tried to rub the smoke out of my vision for forty years now, but my eyes are still burning, Mother.*

Later, in America, Isabella, who is one of the participants in the project that we built, tells of her mother, who lived for just a while:

> *In a way she didn't really die, she simply became smoke. How does one bury smoke? How does one place headstones in the sky? How does one bring flowers to the clouds? Mother, I'm trying to say goodbye to you. I am trying to say goodbye.*

Her poignant questions articulate but a few of the numerous obstacles which have confronted survivors and children of survivors of the Nazi Holocaust. After liberation, as during the war, survivors were victims of a perversive societal reaction comprised of obtuseness, indifference, avoidance, depression, and denial of their Holocaust experiences. Like other victims, survivors' war accounts were too horrifying for most people to listen to or believe. Similar to other victims who are blamed for their victimization, survivors were faced with a pervasively held myth that they had actively or passively participated in their own destiny by "going like sheep to the slaughter." This myth implied not only that they could have fought and that they should have been prepared for the Holocaust as if anyone was or could have been. But it also assumed that the Holocaust victims had somewhere to go if they chose to escape and that the rest of the world wanted them, which was clearly not the case.

Additionally, by standards, guilt lead many to regard the survivors as pointing an accusing finger at them and to project on to the survivors the suspicion that they had performed an immoral act in order to survive. Like other victims, they were also told to let bygones be bygones and to get on with their lives. These reactions insured the survivors' silence about their Holocaust experience. They were forced to conclude that nobody cared to listen and that nobody could really understand them unless they had gone through the same experiences. The resulting conspiracy of silence between Holocaust survivors and society proved detrimental to the survivors' familial and societal cultural integration by intensifying the already profound sense of isolation, loneliness, and mistrust of society. This further impeded the possibility of the interacting, integration, and healing and made their task of mourning their massive losses impossible. Psychotherapists have also typically participated in the conspiracy of silence when survivors mentioned or recounted the Holocaust experiences. In one study, I've identified and systematically examined psychotherapists' counter-transference reactions. My research discovered 49 such reactions.

In analyzing the sources of these reactions, what I discovered is that it is the Holocaust rather than the actual encounter with the survivors or their children. It is the imagination that the therapist has about whatever the Holocaust was that renders the therapist blind and deaf, wanting not to hear or not to see. And I strongly believe that therapists' difficulties in treating other victims—survivors and refugees included under that phrase—may similarly have their roots in the nature of their victimizations. As I said before, such reactions have insured the survivors' silence about their Holocaust experiences. The only option left to survivors other than total solitude or sharing of the Holocaust experience with each other was to withdraw completely into the newly established families. Children of such families, although remembering their parents' and lost families' war histories, as they say, only in bits and pieces, attended to the psychological presence of the Holocaust at home at all times, both verbally and non verbally. In contrast, other survivors welcomed the conspiracy of silence because of their fear that their memories would corrode their own lives and prevent their children from becoming healthy "normal Americans". We touched yesterday in the groups in other discussions about the need to belong and what that does. And what does "normal American" mean, and what does it call upon us to be or become or not become?

But the children grew up in painful bewilderment. They neither understood the inexplicable terror within their families nor their own sense of guilt. The children of survivors seem to have consciously and unconsciously absorbed their parents' Holocaust experiences into their lives. Holocaust survivors' parents, in the attempt to give their best, taught them how to survive, and in the process, transmitted to them the life condition under which they had survived the war. Thus, one finds children of survivors who psychologically and sometimes literally live in hiding. Others are always ready to escape or continuously run from relationships with people, from commitment to a career, or from one place of residence or country or another. Some keep split or double fake identities. Yet others adopt a resigned pacificatory as their motive be in a world that they experienced at the concentration camp.

We see tireless manipulators and those in whom whatever they do are resistent fighters. These modes of being are manifested in their language, behavior, fantasy life and dreams. Many children of survivors, like their parents, manifest these Holocaust-derived behaviors particularly on anniversaries. Moreover, some have internalized as part of their identities the images of those who perished and have simultaneously lived in different places, like in Europe and in America and in different time zones, such as in 1942 and 1988. The therapist, therefore, must be able to encompass that. When you talk about different souls, it's so similar that we can only be full of wonderment about the wisdom of different religions that may coincide with bringing goodness to the world.

Most families of survivors are extremely small. The Holocaust deprived the normal cycle of the generations and ages and of natural death. Survivors on a whole die five years prematurely. The Holocaust took six years of their lives with all their losses, and also reduced the length of their lives when they survived by another five years. They die of all causes, including physical illness and suicide. They're more physically ill than the rest of the population, as well. Each family tree is steeped in death and losses, yet its offspring are expected to re-root that tree and re-establish the extended family, starting a new and healthy generational cycle. They are expected to do so, despite conscious and unconscious resentment against the Nazis and against humankind. They have not had grandparents and relatives; they have been cheated of normal parents and a normal childhood. They have felt different and isolated; they fear another Holocaust. For them, love will mean potential loss. They deeply comprehend that when their own parents say, "You are the only one I have," this is often literally true. These feelings are particularly poignant when survivors approach old age. This is very important. Many Americans will call this a neurotic manipulation by the parents. However, it is quite different when this is the person's reality.

A Program Model

The Group Project for Holocaust Survivors and Their Children was established to counteract the profound sense of isolation and alienation among Holocaust survivors and their children. Formally established in 1975 by volunteer therapists in the

New York City area, the project recognized the vital importance of self-help towards reaching its goals and has capitalized on group and community therapeutic modalities from its inception. In fact, most professionals who have remained with the project are themselves survivors or children of survivors, underscoring the self-help orientation.

By participating in groups, survivors and the children of survivors were able at last to talk about their memories and experiences. They were also able to explore with each other and comprehend the Holocaust's long-term consequences on their lives and share their feelings and concerns. No a priori design existed for the project. Formal methods of treatment developed gradually through trial and error. Flexibility of approach and feedback from survivors and their offspring were most helpful. While acknowledging the long-term effects of the Holocaust and post-Holocaust experience on its survivors and their children, at no point did the project organize and view these individuals as sick or pathological. Survivors' resistance to institutions, their fear of being stigmatized, labeled crazy (stemming from the Nazi practices of gassing the sick and mentally ill), or considered psychologically damaged by the victimization specifically precluded making the project part of the mental health facility. Of course, they are not crazy. All of the suffering makes perfect sense according to their history. They also have many sources of fears that could be labeled. We chose, therefore, not to make our project part of an existing mental health facility.

The project today provides individual family group and intergenerational community assistance in a variety of non-institutional settings. Its goals, which are preventive as well as reparative, are predicated on two major assumptions: one, the integration of Holocaust experiences into the totality of their lives and awareness of the meaning of post-Holocaust dictatorial styles will be liberating and potentially self-actualizing; and two, that awareness of transmitted inter-generational processes will inhibit transmission of pathological behavior to succeeding generations.

This is very important because what we have learned is that if you do not help people right after the victimization and if you do not provide the right kind of help, the next generation and possibly the next generation will also be diseased with the original trauma.

This project's central guiding principle is integration, which in the case of victimization means integrating the extraordinary into one's life—that is, confronting and incorporating aspects of human existence that are not normally encountered in ordinary everyday life. In extreme cases, such as massive catastrophes of the Nazi Holocaust and other holocausts such as yours, victimization not only ruptured continually, but also destroyed all of the individual existing supports. A conspiracy of silence exasperated the situation by further depriving the victim survivors of potential support. Especially, the rupture of victimization rarely has the meaning of "going back to normal." This is true both in terms of re-adopting to "normal society" or returning to prior ways of being and functioning. In fact, the hope of resurrecting their previous lives is unrealizable. Moreover, clinging to such hope may represent a denial of their victimization experiences, which includes feelings of grief, shame, hurt, and guilt.

In contrast, integration and recovery in our formulation involves the victim survivor's ability to develop a realistic perspective of what happened and to identify by whom and to whom the victimization occurred, so they then accept the reality that it happened the way it did. For example, what was and was not under his or her control and what could not be and why are explored. Accepting the impersonality of the events also removes the need to attribute personal causality and consequently guilt in false responsibility. An educated and contained image of the events of victimization potentially frees one from constructing a view of oneself and of humanity solely on the basis of these events. We have learned that our aims are not just to "make people feel better." We intend to help people get better. On a whole, not just to feel better for the short run.

Importance of Mutual Support for Healing

I would like to elaborate further on the reparative value of mutual support in counteracting the survivors' and the children of survivors' sense of isolation and alienation. Survivors rarely say "I". They say "we". It was a massive group murder. That is important to recognize in what you propose as a healing modality. These modalities acknowledge that perhaps only collectively can they find a meaningful response to their horrific history of victimization. Collectively they can best work through their experiences of survivors' guilt and its multiple meanings. They have a necessary, although impossible, task of mourning their massive losses. They blocked responses to the victimizers and to the world that let the Nazis systematically murder 6 million of their people – 1-1/2 million of whom were children.

They experience a sense of shame about witnessing the boundlessness of evil and the fall of civilization and review the meaning of being a Jew and their belief in God after the Holocaust. Psychotherapists customarily would not talk about religion with their patients. We try to return to that since it is such an important part of identity.

Groups and communities established by the projects served to help rebuild the sense of extended family community which were lost during the Holocaust and also help the therapy. The group's therapists may feel overwhelmed by these stories but have eight other survivors or children of survivors sitting there who may be able to listen. They help the therapist feel less burdened, and they do not have to deal with all of this horror alone. That is very important because therapists alone can become enabled to provide what we call a holding environment. It is so needed for the sense of belonging. The group may compensate for that. While any particular intense interaction invoked by memories may prove too overwhelming to some, others do provide the holding reactions. Thus, the group functions as an ideal absorbed entity for our expression of emotions, especially negative ones that are otherwise experienced as un-containable. The group also offers a multiplicity of options for expressing feelings, naming, verbalizing, and modulating them. This is very important because many survivors say they do not have words to describe or express both the events and what they feel. The group as a whole puts the words together. We find words, even songs or whatever, to do express something. It also is a safe place for exploring fantasies, imagining and inviting relatives. I invite also the souls of the family. Sometimes we invite the Nazis, as well, by the way, if somebody needs to tell them how they feel. In fantasies you can do so much work. They take on roles of murdered relatives or victims examining the significance in the identity of the survivor or offspring. Another aspect is to identify and observe other victim-derived behaviors and help group members recognize their own using the peer group for confrontation.

The group confronts the member, and then next time the member may recognize that reaction in somebody else's story, and it is very helpful. Peer groups are much more powerful than therapists alone. The groups can safely test out new behaviors and receive feedback about the impact on others. That's a safe laboratory, rather than out there in the world where you can be knocked and feel rejected again.

We provide individual therapy and family therapy. Family is very important in the context of relatedness. We provide group therapy and group therapy as awareness groups. We have multiple family groups, where one family learns from the other. We have inter-generational community meetings. Every two months on a Sunday from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., we hold an inter-generational community meeting, where everyone is invited. We invite the survivors and the children of survivors who are participating in the project. We include neighbors. The project compensates for the loss of family and extended family and community. We build a community for people who no longer have one at all and who gave up hope of ever having one. We begin it by sharing good news and bad news of members. We begin by finding out if anybody is sick and needs volunteer help to visit them in the hospital because some people, as I said, are totally alone in the world. We do all kinds of combinations in the community, as I shared yesterday. We have grandparents adopted by children without parents and without grandparents, and they help each other.

It is not only during the meeting that we do a lot of sharing. For example, last meeting somebody wrote a song, and we began by singing the song. We promote creativity in the community from within the community. We have at least eight books written by members. Isabella, the woman whose poem I read at the beginning, is a member that was inspired by another. He expressed that if he started crying he would never stop. Or if he started screaming he would shake the whole universe. So people try to put it in writing. They try to express it in sculpture and in paintings. We have had films develop through projects. We have had marriages happen among family members. I am a grandmother for quite a few little babies and a Godmother for a few, as well, and I am not the only one. So we have a community. We have a community that inspires and that is inspired by itself.

I want to emphasize the importance of reliance on community resources and on volunteer work – not just professional work but volunteer spirits within the community and outside of the community, between the community and the rest of the surrounding communities. It is very healing to see volunteers work as healers, not only to the receiver, but very often to themselves. You can create a very wonderful opportunity for people to be good and create something good.

☐ Multi-Cultural Program in a Canadian School

Mr. Tuan Phung
Multi-Cultural Consultant
North York, Ontario

The immediate need of our non-English speaking students in the city of North York, Ontario are the following:

1. The linguistic skills necessary to interact with others and study in English or French.

2. The psycho-social adjustment of our students to the new culture and the learning situation in Canada.

3. Upgrade the skills that they have brought with them. There may be a gap between what they learned before arrival in Canada and what is being demanded by the new system. We help students upgrade their skills to bridge that gap. In order to accomplish this we do the following:

    a. We work with our students.

    b. We work with the parents of the students.

    c. We work with teachers. There are two types of teachers we work with: the teachers who are new to North York and the teachers who have been in our system for quite a number of years.

    d. We work with other students so they know how to help our new students become integrated in the system.

When a new student comes into our system, we immediately provide an academic or educational assessment to the student. This is an initial assessment. We try to provide the following information to the teacher and school staff:

1. Previous school background
2. Family background
3. Skills of the student in the English language
4. Skills of the student in mathematics
5. Observations on behavioral characteristics of the students

We will also incorporate in this part of the report the comments from the student and the comments from the parents. The last part of the report is a series of recommendations. These recommendations vary from one student to another, depending on the needs of the students. Within the first six months, we try to provide the educational assessment. If there is a need, we will later do an interventional assessment. This is required only in difficult cases where there are learning disabilities, handicapped students, or students in extremely difficult situations.

The Multi-Cultural Services Department of the North York Board of Education provides these assessments. The department employs ten multi-cultural consultants, and I am one of them. We take care of students from various linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. We conduct all these assessments with the help of our trained assessment translators. There are 75 different languages spoken within our student population in North York. We have students coming to North York from 125 countries around the world. There are no multi-cultural linguists who possess skills in all of these languages. Therefore, we employ people referred to as "twin assessment translators." These people come from these ethnic backgrounds, and they work under the supervision of the multi-cultural consultants. All these assessments for new students are conducted bi-lingually. Parts of them will be conducted in Vietnamese, should the student come from Vietnam. The other part of the test or the assessment, which requires no language at all, is mathematics. We use math to help us determine the skills of students that come into the system.

Involving the Parents

We believe that to help our students, we need the involvement of the parents and the communities. We have a number of programs in which we try to involve parents. As you know, parents from other countries may not be comfortable in a new environment working with active parents, the school staff, and the school officials. We have to bring them in, but we do not invite them to PTA meetings – they may be scared! They don't speak the language, they don't know the people, and they may not feel comfortable coming to the meetings. The idea of setting meetings, no matter how well-organized, will not get the parents immediately involved. We have means to involve them in the school system, but for a lack of time I cannot elaborate on it. Please contact me later if you are interested in this.

Heritage Language Program

I would like to briefly mention the Heritage Language Program. This program is to help maintain the mother tongue of the students. We emphasize the importance of this program because *it is vital in helping the students to maintain their link to their parents and grandparents.* After some time in Canada, they become more fluent in English or French if they reside in Quebec or Montreal. If they reside in Ontario and other parts of Canada, they will become more fluent in English. The parents and the grandparents will not have their English improved that much. The communication gap is bound to take place between the parents, grandparents, and the students. This program aims at helping students maintain this link with their parents and grandparents in the mother tongue of the students.

Racism Awareness Program

I would like to speak briefly about working with other teachers. We have a problem like anywhere else in the world: the problem of racism. Racism, if you like it or not, exists. We have to accept that fact, and we try to work with it – but we cannot deny it. With the influx of newcomers and new students into our system, our teachers have to be better prepared to handle these new students. We set up a program for the teachers called the Racism Awareness Program. We also have a program for teachers who are new to the system and those who have been with the system longer. We need to prepare these teachers a lot more so they know the people they are going to work with, how they can best help these students, and if they have any uncomfortable feelings about newcomers.

Understanding New Friends

Last, but not least, we need to do some work with other students so that they can help their friends, who are the new students, into the system to work and study together. For the other students in the system, we have two programs: the Chimo Conference and the Multi-Cultural Leadership Program. These two programs are designed to help other students understand a little bit more about their new friends and how they can work together and live in harmony. Having said that, there are a number of things that we have not been able to do. Don't picture inside your mind the image of doing everything we can for our new students. We are trying to do our best. The funding has gone down, and we still trying to provide services to our newcomers. This is something we are justly proud of. We try to do our best in North York to provide our new students with the type of services they need.

Now, what I would like to see happening in North York are the following:

- Connecting new ethnic communities to the system;
- Greater ethnic community involvement with the educational system;
- A Vietnamese parent chairing a PTA meeting;
- More Vietnamese educators;
- A Vietnamese-speaking school trustee.

These are some of the things that we are aiming at, and I, as a multi-cultural consultant, a member of government, and a member of our community, am doing my best to help realize these goals. Thank you.

☐ Reflections on What It Means to Be an American Buddhist

Sharon Bernstein
Social Worker
Montifiore Family Health Center
Bronx, New York

Long before I was a social worker, I was a Buddhist – at least twelve years in this lifetime – and there are many people here who have more experience running Indochinese Mental Health Programs than I do. I am a relative novice; it has only been about three months. I thought what would be most helpful is to speak from the spiritual perspective, really, about the pastoral care of the Buddhist community.

In the traditional Buddhist way, I would like to begin by dedicating the merit we receive from being here together to all sentient beings that they might be liberated. Liberation is the goal of the teachings of Buddha. Secondly, I would like to ask the forgiveness of anyone I may offend by my speech or action. This is also traditional and in my case might be very necessary. Please know that if any of my words cause pain, I accept responsibility for my lack of skillfulness in communicating gently. Accepting responsibility is also a core component of Buddhism.

I speak as an American Buddhist in the Theravadin tradition, which is that tradition practiced in most of Southeast Asia, India, and Ceylon – not however, predominantly in Vietnam. Much of what I have to say, however, has also been expressed to me by Buddhist monks from this tradition. And here is a little bit of a delicate area because I am letting you in on some family secrets. Some of the things I am going to say are things that the monks themselves have difficulty communicating to their own congregation. They are also hesitant to communicate them to other Americans. There is a long history of pain and many reasons for this difficulty. But because I trust in your compassion and your desire to know, it will be all right for us to speak together like this.

As was mentioned earlier, Buddhism exists in Cambodia alongside other traditions such as Brahmanism and different kinds of animism, and so forth. I am speaking particularly about Buddhism from a pragmatic perspective, not because I fail to recognize the importance of other traditions to the Cambodian people. No matter how much we all try to incorporate these traditions into the lives of the refugees we are resettling now, I do not know what the long-term viability is. And I am much more concerned about the liberation of the Asian and the American people that will be happening over all of their future lifetimes, not only whether they can keep their immediate culture. The culture can go and the heart of Buddhism can still be there as a resource.

I spoke about the "merit" from this time of our being together, and it is a strange word. It is used as the English translation for the Pali word "Punna". In Khmer this is called "Bun". As some people use it, one might erroneously think it refers to material gains resulting from performing rituals. That is not the deep understanding. Punna is clarity of mind, and it results from any good action. I hope that we all will leave here with much Punna.

Many of us who work cross-culturally have learned the importance of words and language. We know that when you change your language, you change your culture, your world view. I am going to talk about words. Talking about words is my Kamma (which you also might know in the Sanskrit form: Karma); it is the action I am taking. The result of my actions is called "Vipaka". I mention this because "karma" seems to have entered the English language with an incorrect meaning. In Pali, the word for verb is "kamma"—action, what we do. Action, process, is what is essential to Buddhism. Kamma is also a concept that is frequently misunderstood. People use it to refer to a sort of sense of predestination, and that is really erroneous. If this roof were to fall on my head right now, it is true that it might be the result of an action I took earlier in this life or many thousand years ago. However, if I see this roof cracking, that doesn't mean I have to stand under here and wait for it to happen! You can always change your Vipaka by creating the right action. You can —cut if off at the pass," so to speak.

In Pali, there is another word, "Deva". We can translate this into "angels" or "gods" in the sense of Mercury or Diana or Vulcan or Michael the Archangel—or ultimately as a psychological archetype. Somewhere in the colonial history of Asia, confusion about this "god" developed and persists to this day. Long before there were any Indochinese refugees in this country, I heard a Burmese monk express his frustration that some of his congregation had started to use this word. And it became very confusing because sometimes they were using it to refer to the protector deities, and sometimes they were using it to refer to the Buddha, and neither of these has anything to do with the meaning in Western religions or to Buddhism, to encourage this confusion. It is truly a wondrous thing when any of us can go beyond our conceptual level of thinking, our prejudices, our attachments to being right, and appreciate the true underlying commonality of spiritual experience. To really do this we have to be honest. We have to be equal. As Buddhists we cannot really be equal when we feel we must use your words to express our experience.

Different religions have different strengths and weaknesses. A great strength of Buddhism has been its tolerance – not just tolerance in the sense of putting up with something but in really striving for non-judgmental acceptance. As with many things, the flip side of a strength often reveals a weakness. In this case, it is the fear of speaking with confidence lest we offend someone else. Not causing offence is very important to Buddhists, and it should be so, but sometimes we become short-sided and forget that by not speaking, we might allow someone else to go the wrong way, to do the wrong action. If we allow this to happen, then we share in some responsibility for the suffering that was created. As Buddhists committed to developing our compassion and sense of inter-relatedness to all beings, this would be wrong. I have to tell you that it is very painful for me to always have to be the one to adjust to your world, to your terminology. I can say this because I sense in this group a true and deep desire to understand. I know that many of you have made extraordinary attempts to promote the spiritual well-being of your Buddhist clients and that sometimes the result has been confusion and frustration.

I want to mention another word: "Dhamma" (Dharma). What God is for Muslims, Jews, and Christians, Dhamma is for Buddhists. It means the truth, the essence of the universe, the process of existence. It is no less a convention or concept for something nameable than is God, but how and what we choose to name reveals a significant part of our world view. In interfaith services, God is sometimes replaced by the Creator. That doesn't work either; "creating" might come closer. Our emphasis is very different. Where you see an entity, we see a process. I still firmly believe that we are all looking at the same thing, but I cannot look through your glasses, and when I try, all I see is a blur.

Four years ago, I went to North Carolina to assist in developing a Buddhist Temple that had been started by the local USCC Office and actually named after the director: the Sister Francis Buddhist Temple. One time I went on a trip to South Carolina with the Buddhist monk to an old textile mill town where many Khmer had been resettled by a church of another persuasion. It turned out that they were virtually prisoners of the pastor. Now the people were coming to see the monk, not me, but as the day wore on, more and more people came to sit and look at me; they had never seen an American Buddhist. Most could not speak to me in English. Finally, one woman spoke up and told me a story of how she had been baptized as a Christian because she thought she had no choice. Now her two children were devout followers of this new faith, and she felt that they were in some way as lost to her as her others had been to the Khmer Rouge. She looked me very steadily in the eye, which is not typical, and said, "People have made me do so many things I have not wanted to, but they will never change my heart!"

It is not enough that you, that I, are not the ones who do this, or that you find it appalling. It *has* been done. It has been done by one religion, one group, one country to others *time and time again*. Our good intentions cannot erase thousands of years of this pain.

"Belief" is another confusing word. In the West we are concerned with absolutes; "I believe in God" has a very clear meaning for most of us. What about "I believe in democracy?" In one case, we are talking about whether something exists, and in the other, whether or not we support it. An Asian who says he doesn't believe in spirits isn't necessarily saying that they don't exist, it is just that he is not their devotee. I do not think it would occur to most Buddhists to doubt the existence of your President. Why would you say God existed if She didn't?

This puts Buddhists at a disadvantage. We don't know there is a competition going on and you think we have already surrendered. You may not want to dominate us, but the reality is that this has been your world up until now, created by your world view. And as much as I appreciate your sincere efforts to include us, I worry that it is more likely we are going to be co-opted or swallowed up. It is a beautiful and it's true that Buddhism and Western religions have much to offer each other, and wonderful things are happening in this country on that level. In one way, that is entirely consistent with our tradition: "Take what is useful and leave the rest behind." But when you take our meditation here and "Zen car repair" there, I feel more like we are being dismantled or cannibalized. You must be able to look US in the eye and KNOW that we are a complete system of life and understanding five hundred years before Christ was born.

Whether the Khmer can keep their practice of Buddhism alive is really just a tiny example of this issue; all over the planet whole cultures are being obliterated. It is not only our plant and animal life that are endangered species.

This is a very historic time for Buddhists. The migration of so many people from Asian countries coincides with an unprecedented growth of the number of American Buddhists. We know that everything is impermanent – Anicca – but it is still incredible to witness the various changes that have taken place in Korea, China, Tibet, and Japan, in Indochina, and now there is growing instability in Sri Lanka and Burma. For 2,500 years this precious jewel of the dhamma has been passed down to us, and now it is endangered; this is a very difficult time. Now it has been passed across the seas to us in the U.S. and Europe.

Therivada tradition is inherently monastic, with a beautiful reciprocity between the monks and nuns and the lay people. I wish I could tell you what it feels like to be on the other side of the planet, in a village consisting of a dozen grass huts, walking in bare feet, eyes downcast, head shaved, a few hours after dawn, going on alms rounds for the only meal of the day. The village women coming out with such generosity from their only supplies to fill our bowls with rice. Not because they were going to get a Mercedes Benz in their next life, but because of the respect they had for those who would choose a spiritual path. As wonderful as this life is, it does not translate well to the Bronx.

Monks must keep 227 precepts that cover every aspect of their behavior. They cannot be alone with a woman or shake hands. They cannot wear shoes or handle money or eat after noon. And when they are forced to adapt to some of these rules, in order to be able to function, to serve their people, they risk being regarded as "loose" or immoral monks.

Someone told me that some Khmer were puzzled by the question, "What is your religion?" when they arrived in Thailand. Buddhism was not a religion, a chosen item; it was a part of life, part of being Khmer. It was inextricably interwoven with every other aspect of life. I think that explains part of the problem for the Khmer in the U.S. We live very compartmentalized lives. Our jobs, our social class, our education, our families – these things are not necessarily connected. But for the Khmer, the natural flow, the interdependence which is so important, has been so disrupted so that the mechanisms for maintaining one-piece religion simply do not exist.

Couple that with the tragic reality that almost all of the religious leaders were killed, and it becomes obvious why the temples have not become the source of strength and healing that many American resettlement workers hoped they would. There only a handful of truly learned and developed monks to serve all of the Khmer people in the world.

Many of the dynamics of Buddhism are similar to those of any organized religion; we have our "Liberation Theologians" and our "Cardinal Ratzingers"; we have issues of inequality between monks and nuns; we have contemplatives and social activists. What we haven't had yet is our "Vatican II."

Here I would like to echo what Father Tran said yesterday about the education of our children. They have already become Westernized. It is pointless to think that they can spend most of the day in public schools and be otherwise. If we are going to teach them the practice of the Dhamma, we must do it in a way that is relevant to their lives as they are now. It would be a tragic irony if the most scientific religion in the history of the planet, the religion that delineated the process of the mind with incredible exactness twenty five hundred years before Western science even dared approach it, is dismissed by our children as being nothing but "a lot of old ladies burning incense." It would also be a tragedy because in it lies the potential source for healing the deep wounds that the Khmer people have suffered.

One of the greatest contributions the Asians are making to our culture is that they do not have a word for "mental health". How could these numerous sophisticated ancient societies have survived without it? It is virtually all we Americans think about: "How am I feeling?"

American Buddhists have also learned a difficult lesson related to this question. Many of us began practicing Buddhist meditation without the context of Buddhism. A lot of turmoil and even scandal has resulted. Without Sila (ethics), without the development of the Paramis (the perfections of behavior), meditation practice can be as self-serving as any other pursuit. The answer to these issues is that one cannot separate out aspects of one's life. Everything we do (our Kamma) has results (Vipaka) that affect everything else we do. Everything we do affects not only everyone else, but the entire process of the universe.

The historical process of Buddhism also has commonalities with Western religion; it has gone through its conservative and progressive stages. As much as we can, and I believe we should make a case for the radical nature of Jesus, we can do the same for Buddha. Siddhattha Gaotama was born to a life of absolute privilege, and he gave it all up. Not just the material wealth of a king's son, but the most basic attachment: to the belief in a self! If you can imagine how much flack Jesus took for telling people to love their neighbor, try to imagine this young ex-prince telling people that they do not exist! He was a tireless advocate against the caste system, which distorted both the lives of people and the meaning of Kamma and rebirth. With some initial resistance on his part, he admitted women to his order with equal status.

However, the reality is that any belief system can be misused and co-opted by the powerful in a society, and that has happened as many times in Buddhism as it has in Christianity.

Buddhism provides not only the inspiration for liberation, but a precise blueprint for achieving it. In this area, Buddhists and Christians are alike. Most of us would like to do the easiest thing – say a few prayers or chant, give a stained glass window to the church, or food to the monks. All of these things are of critical importance because they support our practice, but they are not the heart of it. Without the opportunity to study and practice the heart of the Dhamma, these hollow walls we construct around it will crumble and fall. This has already happened for many Southeast Asians. By design or circumstance, most of those who come here as refugees have not had the opportunity to learn extensively about the Dhamma. In any situation this would be sad, but given the incredible suffering that Cambodia has gone through, and continues to endure, it will be an added tragedy if this cannot be reversed.

I went with my interpreter recently to talk to the monk about my mental health program. I do not know how she translated the name, but it seemed to result in an appropriate response. He told us that the most important thing for us to do was to develop the Brahma Viharas – the divine abodes – of Karuna (compassion), Upekkha (equanimity), Mudita (sympathetic joy), and Metta (loving kindness). If we have these, we will be good counselors, and we will be successful in helping our clients and friends.

EXTEMPORANEOUS SUMMARY

Father Ed Killackey
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers
Washington, DC

My first general comment is the realization of where we are. We are in a retreat center which is directed by the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement – a mispronounced word, because it should be pronounced at-one-ment. And everything we did here these days was to kind of achieve within the human community – our brothers and sisters – an atoning. This is a gathering of plurality and a gathering of difference. So the sight couldn't have been chosen better – other than a sight under the direction of a group of women whose call in life is to achieve, in any way possible, the at-one-ing of the human community – the mix of people, the men and the women, the young. In the working groups I saw the assertive and articulate women of Southeast Asia, and watched the macho men of Southeast Asia saying, "How come she's so assertive? She shouldn't be that in our own culture." They are obviously showing the adaptation to the American scene. All of this took place, and I just want to highlight some of the things that really took place.

One. The entire days together were acts of hospitality to the stranger, those of us who are strangers to each other. And it evidenced the meaning of hospitality – that one doesn't change by advice, one doesn't change by programs, one doesn't change by proposals. One human being changes when another human being invites him or her into his or her space so they can speak to themselves from their own center. And that happened. It was beautiful to see the way that happened. One of the more gifted things that happened among us was the constant reinforcement by one panelist of what a keynoter or another panelist might have said. That is evidence of attentiveness and listening.

I want to just list the themes that happened in the days we were together. We—those of us here in the United States—we come from a world of dichotomy, and we were dealing with people who come from the rich world of a continuum. We of programs and they of life-giving, life-bearing reality.

We see a major tension in the group: the tension between time and telling one story. It is an obvious advantage to be number one on the panel, and the longest period of time in history seemed to follow the word "finally". Today we saw, probably, one of the best defenses in all of oratorical history when the speaker, having completed his time, introduced his other speaker. I mean that's class; that's really class. And it's probably good we didn't stay together for three days because of the positive disregard of Meg this morning, with her "five minutes" signs. Lord knows what would have happened tomorrow.

But, I just offered that realization that there was a tremendous tension between time and story, and very possibly *the major dilemma that faces your task and mine in relating to the people we relate to is we are unavailable to hear the story.* And, only people who love each other have the courage to tell each other stories. It is believed that God created us because God loves stories, and that tension is a happy tension of time and story. Those of us, myself—there is a world that is linear among us. Word has print, little specks on a piece of paper, and this room was filled with people for whom "word" is an event in sound. And that was a very happy tension. There are people who don't need the conference report because they were here, heard it all, and will remember it all. We want the conference report because if it's in print, it really happened. Whereas, for other people of other cultures, if you heard it, it happened. If you have to write it down—I worked in a culture for eighteen years, where the contractual and the writing down was a sign of distrust not trust. And that, you know, that happy thing was among us.

We saw, all of us, poised to be change agents, the importance of doing what the bureau has done on our behalf: convening us. *And probably the task in all of our work and care in the future is, not so much to act on others, but to convene like-minded and like-hearted people so they can talk to each other.* There is probably less for us as agents to do. And our whole new job description is not to be a giver but to be a receiver. There's a humility to receiving. The people of Africa are still waiting for the first white person to come among them who needs something; it is a strong, strong feeling among them. The exorcisms that we need – let's realize after these days, and it was said often, that the multi-cultural for many of us, certainly the white Caucasian, is to realize that body and soul go together. That's a multi-cultural experience. Secondly, that self is a culture. And the struggle we had in hearing and understanding many times would be the fact that gaining selfward, moving to selfward, is as much a struggle of culture as anything else cultural that we face in our lives. Compassion – probably the most beautiful description that I heard of compassion was letting someone do what they didn't think they would be able to do, letting go, *being more of a listener than a proclaimer.*

Other themes – the differences in the groups. We had a fantastic keynote where we saw the differences, not only the nuances but active differences between the groups of Southeast Asia. We have to realize that we have to relate to those groups and touch them individually. We also advise the same five groups that they have a refugee task of beginning to relate to each other, that their differences have to be overcome, that they do not represent countries specifically, but they represent the reality of Southeast Asia in some sort of a community.

We saw evidence all through the talks of the importance of strangers in our lives. In all scriptural religions it is the stranger who bears the revelation. *It is never the host who bears revelation; it is the stranger or the guest, he or she,* *who bears the revelation.* And I remind you that if you chop up the word "stranger", you wind up with the word "anger". And a lot of the strangeness in the American mix at the moment generates anger. Difference, plurality, and diversity oftentimes in the lives of vanilla people generate anger. Understand the anger. We've seen many people; we've had corrections; some of us wrote names backwards. In another culture we'd kill for that.

And oftentimes if you move among peoples, it's, you know, in not knowing something that we tend to smile. In some cultures the smile without meaning is doubly suspect.

Truth—we learned that many times truths are not direct speech. *Most truths in my life have been overheard,*and real truths in life are often tangential, from the side, told on the slant.

We've seen culture as a birthright, and we've also seen people who now have to make the choice of culture as choice. We've talked of loving each other but also anyone with a multi-cultural experience knows that you can relate to someone in distance as well as by love. Respecting the space of another, you know, not saying to someone I am going to make you free even if it kills you. This may be a definition of religious education.

We've seen and we all see in our lives—I worked in a culture for eighteen years where nothing of purpose was done without the relational being taken care of. In the middle of a keynote, someone among whom I worked would stand up and say to the keynoter, you have not greeted me yet. You can interrupt any reality in life by asking for a greeting.

When I came back after eighteen years in Africa, my brothers and sisters, my family thought I had had a cerebral hemorrhage, because I acted different, and all my nieces and nephews wanted to talk to me because I had two speeds: slow and stop. And the American mind at the moment is at fifty-five miles per hour. *No one can fast-food truth like we can, and that's the dilemma when one immerses oneself in this culture.*

We had a beautiful presentation this morning and yesterday of memory as past. For many of us, memory is past, and then we were reminded that memory is solidarity with the present and the future, and that's a radical cultural difference. Yet for those of us of semitic roots, we're told that.

There is a corporate remembering – when we are told to take bread and break it, it is to occasion remembering not cerebral, not psychic but member to member. And in any bread breaking, any probably significant realizations were achieved in this place at the time of breaking the bread – tabling. Tabling is so critical. Where you place us says more to our value in many times than what you say to us.

The final thing would be that we have seen the value of proverb. A proverb in many ways is a synopsis of truth. Many other insights – you have them all. I'm not going to burden you with those.

The final comment that I would have – our theme in all of the days and times together was, *if we don't make the community the educator, we're going nowhere in achieving cross-cultural relationship and enhancement.* It is not, and it is so easy for us here to make it an individualistic and atomistic task, where we think if an individual knows, the community knows. That's not.

The conversion of community and the transformation of family to richness and the reduction of prejudice is a community task. And for those of us of certain faiths, we can only speak of God in terms of community. And that's a rich lesson for all of us. Strategies – today the thing I heard. It would seem that one of the gifts is to take your differences of language and culture and awareness and make them skills for the American to learn forever. Don't ask us why; we just want to keep learning. And we really couldn't answer the question, "Why?"

Racism – I speak from experience overseas and here. In today's world, something radical and serious is beginning to happen to people of color. Those of us who are not among that richness better begin to put our heads and hearts together. Radical and serious things are beginning to be mounted against people of color. You addressed it today in many of your working groups: the racism reality. Because that peppers fires and is the catalyst oftentimes for a lot of multi-cultural dilemma.

My most vivid imagery of the times that I was privileged to see here – and I will live with it forever – is a Buddhist monk leaving his temple with an attache case. That's acculturation. What is left except to lay down and die.

Final comment. I personally and hopefully, on behalf of all of you, want to thank Rosemarie for feeling you were among friends and sharing what you did this morning. And I want to thank a woman of very low voltage – very shy, retiring, and unassuming Yael Danieli. High voltage, I think, for the sharing that she brought us again this morning. Lovely people, it has been a good time. Hopefully, I have been able to strike and reflect the insights to the themes that you have. It has been in my life, a gift to be among you. Thank you.

Vietnamese refugee at government dock in Kowloon, Hong Kong.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Four multi-disciplinary working groups addressed issues raised in the conference presentations. The workshops were designed to identify Southeast Asian refugee children in need of services and to recommend strategies and approaches to better meet their spiritual and psycho-social needs.

The goal of the conference was to inform those serving refugee children about the importance of identifying and addressing the spiritual and non-material needs of these children. Since this conference was one of the first convened on this topic, the following recommendations and observations are broad, diffused, and varied, as well as specific and detailed.

The following are recommendations from the working groups and the presentations.

GENERAL APPROACHES

- Everyone must be more available to hear the refugees' stories. Only people who deeply care for each other have the courage to tell each other stories. The task for all care providers in the future is not so much to act on others, but to convene like-minded and like-hearted people so they can talk to each other.
- Racism is the catalyst for many multi-cultural problems, but prejudice can be reduced by working on a community level. It is only by making the community the educator that cross-cultural relationships and enhancement can be achieved. The reduction of prejudice is a community task.

- The newcomers, especially the children, should be provided with a sense of belonging and an opportunity to grow in their self-esteem. Children and youth have a strong need to belong. Joining a gang is a cry for help. Young people need to be provided with a lot of activities to keep them focused on something other than joining gangs, getting into trouble, and acting out in school.

- It is important to share ideas with refugee youth on how to spend leisure time. What kinds of things can be done when one is by her/himself or with a group of people? What activities are free, and what can one enjoy without having to spend a lot of money? Participate in these activities yourself—become a role model—and youth will start following your example.

- Many Southeast Asian parents try to recreate the same family life in the U.S. that they had in their home country. Their children try to remain "Southeast Asian" at home and strive to be "American" in school and with their peers. The problems of the children cannot be separated from the problems of their parents. Parents need to better understand what is happening with their children and how they can help. Adults need an opportunity to voice their concerns and exchange views on how they can better relate to their children.

- It is important that parents and children speak the same language. Reach out to encourage and support parents to learn English. Young people acculturate and learn the language faster than their parents because they are in school.

- At the same time, learning and maintaining the ethnic languages are important tools for communication, mutual understanding, and peace in the family. It is important for the Asian family that children can write and/or communicate with their grandparents in their native languages.

- There is a need for videos to help refugee youth on the spiritual level. Tapes are available to teach English, cultural shock, and the grieving process, but there is nothing on the spiritual level to help refugee children, particularly those who are illiterate in their native language. It would be helpful to have a video tape in simple language that would provide these kids with comfort and an uplifting message.

- Young people must be helped to reach their own source of spirituality. One way is to suggest that the young person try to get in touch with God or Buddha when she/he is in trouble. [Many participants said they were careful in doing this because they do not want to be accused of proselytizing.]

CLERGY

- Young people need to hear more concrete and comprehensible messages based on religious values. Since religious values are not taught in schools, the pressure is on clergy and families to provide religious messages to children about the following: Why am I here? Where will I go after I die? How should I cope with the things I do not understand?
- There is a need for spiritual literacy. In order to achieve this, there is a need for more texts and clearer language to convey religious information to children.
- Young people need to be encouraged to look deeper into the roots of great religions.
- There is a need to be more culturally-sensitive toward refugees who seek help.
- There is a need for greater tolerance toward newcomers and their families.
- Clergy could participate in a concerted effort to increase tolerance and understanding among each other and other religious groups.

Lao refugee child in the Ban Nam Yao camp, Thailand.

FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES

- Parishes and other faith-based communities need to help the integration process. American parishioners must not look down on refugees as "poor" people. They need to look upon refugees as their own peers, their own people, and invite them into their homes to be a part of their social gatherings.
- Parishioners need to understand that refugees can bring richness to forms of liturgy and worship.
- Many religious songs are uplifting and full of meaning. If they are translated into native languages, parents and young people will better understand the meaning of the words as they learn English.

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PARENTS

- Parents and children need to communicate more openly and respect each other in view of their new roles in this culture.
- Children need to experience parents respecting each other in their new roles in a new culture. Children need parents as role models; parents should view their children as individual persons.
- Children need to feel the compassion and affection of their family members. One of the ways to do this is for parents to use more sensitive language when speaking to children.

FOSTER PARENTS

- It is important for foster parents to connect with the foster child's biological parents. New foster parents can send a letter or telegram to their foster child's parents in Asia telling them that the child has arrived and where they are.
- It is important for foster parents to share a child's pain when he or she is willing to express it. The burden of loneliness should not remain on the children even though they are willing to accept it. It can take a long time for a child to open up. One foster mother reported that it took her teenage foster son six and one-half years before he could cry and admit that he wanted his mother. However, once he was able to express that, it was easier for him to go on with his life and connect with his new home.
- Foster parents could maintain an appreciation for their foster children's heritage by celebrating their religious festivals, holidays, and ceremonies.
- Foster parents should be oriented at an early stage about the religious heritage of their foster child and directed to resources and local institutes or centers where they can get more information.

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- Foster parents could appreciate the fact that Southeast Asians venerate family life in a way that is not common in American culture. The unaccompanied refugee minor may passionately long for the day that she or he will be reunited with family. The Asian value of education may also be allied with this value. The children study and work extremely hard so that they can earn money for their parents to come to the U.S. Many of them feel guilty that they are here and well fed, happy, healthy, and enjoying life. How can they be guided through their "guilt"? We need to discover values that may transcend these religions and cultures to find links between children of many cultures and identify binding elements that could help them to survive in a more healthy way.

MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

- There is a need for increased awareness among mental health professionals that caring for the spiritual needs of refugee children is linked to promoting their mental health. Cultural heritage and religious values often serve as protective factors in times of stress and trauma.
- Provision should be made for access to cultural heritage. Preserving culture and tradition is a serious issue for parents, but many youth have not acquired the culture and tradition yet. At the same time, they are trying to adjust to a new culture.
- There is a need for more refugee mental health services for youth in the U.S. and in the camps overseas. Resources overseas vary greatly according to the camps. In the U.S. it is difficult to gain a solid understanding of national networks serving the mental health needs of refugee youth. Resources vary according to geographical location, and this may reflect the limited services which exist nationally.
- There is a need for more and better communication and sharing of information among mental health networks na-

tionally and internationally. It is easy to become isolated, but it is enormously helpful to learn the important work going on in different states and regions.

- Blind referrals for professional consultations should be avoided. Although it takes an enormous effort to maintain a solid network of reliable people in a particular community, it may be damaging for a child if a referral is made to someone who does not know the limits of their professional expertise.
- Separate fact from opinion when preparing and reading assessment reports. Sometimes people's feelings and beliefs are not qualified and may be recorded as fact.
- Assessment reports should focus on the child within the family context – not on the child in isolation.
- When dealing with a child who is experiencing problems, ascertain the position that the child holds in the family. For example, the youngest child in a Vietnamese family has a different role from the eldest. One mental health professional noted that there was a rising number of attempted suicides by the eldest daughters. This was attributed to the fact that the eldest are sometimes taking care of parents who are too mentally and physically ill to care for themselves.
- Assess family strengths. These strengths can be developed to help people increase their coping capacity and initial adjustment.
- Clinicians should provide more direct follow-up. Reports should include follow-up plans and long-range contingency plans.
- There is a need for increased collaboration between Western-trained physicians, mental health workers, and traditional healers within the refugee community.
- There is a need for more active involvement of refugees in the mental health field. Increased scholarships and higher pay are needed for the acquisition of professional credentials.

- The mental health field as a profession must receive increased sanction from the refugee community.
- Western practitioners must increase their knowledge about Southeast Asian traditions in order to avoid misinterpreting behaviors.
- Advisory boards for mental health clinics should be comprised of community leaders. Community leaders and volunteers can be used to assist programs for refugees.

RESETTLEMENT AGENCIES AND AGENCIES SERVING UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS

- Refugee children should be connected with their past and present. It is helpful if a bi-lingual caseworker writes a letter to the parents introducing her/himself and explains the program in which the child has been placed.
- It is important to identify the key cultural and religious values of refugee children. This can be done by eliciting advice from religious leaders, community leaders, and, if possible, the elders. If these people do not speak English, a bi-lingual child or staff person can assist in translation.
- It is important for care providers to learn about and replicate the religious ceremonies and observances that have been used for troubled youth in traditional cultures. For example, if a Buddhist child is experiencing maladjustment, there are specific times that one can go to the temple and the monks will do a blessing or a short ritual to recreate good luck. Staff can encourage foster care families to continue to use some of these ceremonies in the home.
- If possible, religious ceremonies should be created fairly early on after arrival. It helps the child make a ritual transition from home society or refugee camp society to American society.

- Foster care youth should be provided with information about appropriate sexual behavior. There have been several cases of sexual abuse in foster homes where foster kids have been the perpetrators and not the victims. These cases appear to have occurred because the children had received no information about appropriate sexual behavior. Children receive so much misinformation from the media and in school from their peers. It is just as important that they are provided with the sexual education they need in this culture as it is for them to know the English language.

- There is a need for more bi-lingual case workers, managers, and translators who can better understand the needs of refugees who lack the specific language skills to voice their needs.

EDUCATORS

General

- The assessment tools used to determine the placement of children need to be improved. Some refugee children and youth are labeled "learning disabled" when in reality they simply do not understand English.

- Educators and school authorities should be encouraged to draw on the advice of the community and spiritual leaders.

- Areas in which educators and spiritual leaders can cooperate should be explored.

- School counselors need to be educated about the plight of refugee children so that they can make reasonable judgments about their behavior. One school counselor felt that a Cambodian child was seriously disturbed and needed to be institutionalized because the child had drawn pictures of beheadings and executions. The drawings were expressions of an experience, but they were interpreted as indicative of a pathology.

- There is a need for more Southeast Asian educators, as well as more Southeast Asian parent involvement with the educational system.

Religious Educators

Buddhist

- Parents, educators, and monks need to continue working together to teach children and share their knowledge with them.
- Parents, teachers, and other adults need to take greater care to understand children's minds and be more patient with them.
- If children are to be taught the practice of the Dhamma, it must be done in a way that is relevant to their lives. It would be a tragedy not to do this because in it lies the potential source for healing the deep wounds that the Khmer people have suffered.

Catholic

- It is necessary to be creative in delivering the messages of the respective faiths. Children need interaction; they need to ask questions and receive answers. The learning process can be fun for all.
- Catholic educators must keep themselves updated. There is a need to be as up to date as the media, which has a powerful impact on youth.

YOUTH

- Refugee youth should recognize the value of being bilingual. They should be proud of their native language and work at maintaining it. The United States is a nation of immigrants and refugees; there will be many more people coming from Southeast Asia, and resettled youth can greatly help newcomers if they can maintain their native language.

- Refugee youth must recognize the importance of education. They may have to study and work harder than the average American who already knows the language. Refugee youth should work hard to set a good example; this may make it easier for the newcomers who follow.

Vietnamese refugee in a boat at government dock in Kowloon, Hong Kong.

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PRESENTERS AND PARTICIPANTS

Presenters

Nguyen Bachyen
Social Worker
Catholic Charities
215 Old 6th Street
St. Paul, MN 55102

Rose Marie Battisti
Executive Director
Mohawk Valley Resource Center
for Refugees
249 Bleeker Street
Utica, NY 13501

Sharon Bernstein
Social Worker
Montifiore Family Health Center
Private address:
2712 Claflin Avenue
Bronx, NY 10468

Dr. Florentius Chan
White Memorial Medical Center
Mental Health Services Program
1720 Brooklyn Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90033-2481

Dr. Yael Danieli
Director
Group Projects for Holocaust
Survivors and Their Children
345 East 80th Street, Apt. 30 J
New York, NY 10021

Monsignor Nicholas DiMarzio
Executive Director
Migration and Refugee Service
U.S. Catholic Conference
1312 Massachusetts Avenue
Washington, DC 20005

Dr. Julianne Duncan
Program Development Caseworker
Lutheran Social Services
19230 Forest Park Drive, NE
Seattle, WA 98155

Dr. Kirk Felsman
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry
Department of Psychiatry
Dartmouth Medical School
Hanover, NH 03756

Ms. Sopha Hang
Multi-Cultural Social Worker
Unaccompanied Refugee Minors
Program
Lutheran Family Services of
Oregon and Southwest
Washington
605 SE 39th Avenue
Portland, OR 97214-3298

Father Edward Killackey
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers
4834 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20011

Sister Claire Langie
Sister Vergilia Jim
Om Shalom House of Prayer
2435 Devoe Terrace, Apt. 7A
Bronx, NY

Khamchong Luangpraseut
Supervisor
Indochinese Programs
Santa Ana Unified School District
1405 French Street
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Mr. Tuan Phung
Multi-Cultural Consultant
Brookbanks Center
217 Brookbanks Drive
North York, Ontario
Canada

Ms. Carrie Price Reilly
Camp Hill Village, U.S.A.
Pughtown Road
Kimberton, PA 19442

Father Pham Quang Thuy
Director
Office of Cross Cultural Services
Department of Mental Health,
Mental Retardation and
Substance Abuse Services
P.O. Box 1797
Richmond, VA 232114

Father Peter Tran
Special Assistant
Pastoral Care of Migrants and
Refugees
U.S. Catholic Conference
Washington, DC 20005

Venerable K. Uparatana
Buddhist Viahara Temple
5017 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20011

Stefan Vanistendael
Deputy Secretary General
International Catholic Child Bureau
65, rue de Lausanne
1202 Geneva
Switzerland

Dr. Carolyn Williams
Division of Epidemiology
School of Public Health
University of Minnesota
Stadium Gate #27
611 Beacon Street, NE
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Mr. Kao Yang
Hmong Catholic National
Association
1076 East Magnolia Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55106

Participants

Phuong Ly Allen
Bi-Lingual Caseworker
Catholic Social Service of Tucson
Migration and Refugee Service
3200 North Los Altos
Tucson, AZ 85705

Margaret M. Bedard, Ph.D.
President
ICCB-USA
300 Pelham Road
Apartment #8A
New Rochelle, NY 10805

Kim Cook
Executive Director
MAA Consortium
5909 Columbia Pike, #103
Falls Church, VA 22041

Ruth Anne Dawson
Resettlement Coordinator
Lutheran Refugee Services
5121 Colorado Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20011

Ed Fichter
Coordinating Director
Holy Childhood Association: Young Catholics in Mission
1720 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036

Donna Grim
Volunteer Coordinator
Catholic Social Service of Philadelphia
222 North 17th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Julie Hopkins
Office of Refugee Resettlement
Diocese of Richmond
811 Cathederal Place, Suite E
Richmond, VA 23220

Dorothy Ivey
UNHCR
Branch Office for the USA
1718 Connecticut Avenue
Washington, DC 20009

Lou Johnston
Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program
P.O. Box 2248
748 North President Street
San Diego, CA 92111

Lori Kimes
Director/Counselor
Khamphet Keopraseurt
Full-time Volunteer
Somboon Sitandon
Youth Counselor and Liaison
S.E. Asian Youth at Risk Program
Mount Virgin Refugee Project
1535-29th Avenue South
Seattle, WA 98144

Reverend Chhean Kong, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer
The Cambodian Buddhist Temple
2100 West Willow Street
Long Beach, CA 90810

Ratana Kulsiripatana
112 Edgemoor Lane, #09A
Ithaca, NY 14850

Reverend Louis Leduc
Coordinator
Laotian Pastoral Center
3508 Maurice Avenue
Fort Worth, TX 76111

Michele MacMillan, OP
Director
Mount Virgin Refugee Project
1535 29th Avenue South
Seattle, WA 98144

Father John Mai
Saint Theresa Church
712 North School Street
Honolulu, HI 96817

Dr. Patricia S. Maloof
Education Coordinator
Connections
701 West Broad Street, Suite 305
Falls Church, VA 22046

Dr. Julie McDonald
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee
Service
360 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10001

Mary Ellen McMillen
Volunteer Leader
4-H Youth Program
Arlington County
Virginia Cooperative Extension
Service
6121 32nd Place, N.W.
Washington, DC 20015

Frank Moan, S.J., Director
Sister Barbara Karl, SND
Refugee Voices: A Ministry with
Uprooted Peoples
713 Monroe Street, N.E.
Washington, DC 20017

Mount Virgin Refugee Project
1535 29th Avenue South
Seattle, WA 98144

Pamela Murray
Louise Wise Services
12 East 94th Street
New York, NY 10128

Sister Nicole Nguyen, C.C.
Catholic Charities
100 North Winchester Boulevard,
#264
Santa Clara, CA 95050

Rev. An Ninh Nguyen
Vietnames Catholic Clergy &
Religious Association
581 E. 14 Mile Road
Clawson, MI 48017

Rev. Hien Minh Nguyen
Diocese of San Jose
100 N. Winchester Blvd., #369
Santa Clara, CA 95050

Tran Thi Nguyet
Supervisor
Catholic Guardian Society
90-04 161st Street
Jamaica, NY 11432

Khampheng Phabmixat
President
Laotian Catholic Lay Association
2205 Comstock Street
San Diego, CA 92111

Sr. Theresa Hang Pham
Sr. Lucy Luong
Vietnamese Dominican Sisters
St. Catherine Convent
5250 Gasmer Drive
Houston, TX 77035

Herb Power
Foster Care Coordinator
Catholic Social Service of Phoenix
1825 West Northern
Phoenix, AZ 85201

Mary Anne Quinlan
Pastoral Care of Migrants and
Refugees
1312 Massachusetts Avenue
Washington, DC 20005

Mitzi Schroeder
Special Assistant for U.S. Program
International Catholic Migration
Commission
"F" Street, NW
Suite 820
Washington,DC 20004

Rosalind Smith
Director
Migration Refugee Service/USCC
200 North Glembe Road
Arlington, VA 22203

Sausan Sorial, Case Manager
Catholic Community Services
1 Summer Avenue
Newark, NJ 07047

Evelyn Sparks
Catholic Counseling Service
3845 Oaklawn
Dallas, TX 75219

Clayton Spitzer
Social Worker
Lutheran Social Services
5121 Colorado Avenue
Washington, DC 20010

Rosemary Winder Strange
Associate Director for Social Services
Catholic Charities USA
1319 "F" Street, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Reverend Daniel Taillez, OMI
Hmong Catholic Center
951 East 5th Street
St. Paul, MN 55106

Sister Cecilia Tong, A.C.T.
Director
Vietnamese Catholic Center
c/o Vietnames Catholic Pastoral Care
1029 Arosa Avenue
Charlotte, NC 28203

Ngo Dung Trinh
Program Analyst
DHHS FSA/Office of Refugee Resettlement
370 L'Enfant Promenade, SW
Washington, DC 20447

Dr. Tran Minh Tung
6521 Arlington
Apartment #412
Falls Church, VA 22042

Robert J. Vitillo
Chief of Service for Europe and North America
Caritas Internationalis, Vatican City
c/o Catholic Charities USA
1319 "F" Street, NW
Washington, DC 200040

Hoeun Voeuk, Caseworker
Nang Tai Vo, Caseworker
Betsy Davis, Caseworker
Grace Sheehy, Caseworker
Savis Ngo, Caseworker
Catholic Community Services
5410 North 44th Street
Tacoma, WA 98407

Thanh N. Vu
Resource Counselor
Francesca Reilly-McDonnell,
Project Specialist
Arlington County Public Schools
HILT Special Needs Project
1426 North Quincy Street
Arlington, VA 22207

Maureen Webster
Director of Social Programs and Social Services
Refugee Program
1825 W. Northern
Phoenix, AZ 85021

Diane Wilkinson
Counselor
Catholic Social Service
1825 W. Northern
Phoenix, AZ 85201

Amy Wells, RN, MS
Psychiatric Nurse Clinician
Ann Ryan, CSJ
Unit Secretary
Brighton Marine Public Health Center
Indochinese Psychiatry Clinic
77 Warren Street
Brighton, MA 02135

Conference Organizer and Moderator

Meg Gardinier
Director
New York Secretariat
International Catholic Child Bureau, Incorporated
323 East 47th Street
New York, NY 10017

Facilitators

Marta Brenden
Consultant for Children in Migration
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
122 C Street, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20001

Florence Bruce, Assistant
International Catholic Child Bureau
65, rue de Lausanne
1202 Geneva, Switzerland

Khamchong Luangpraseut
Supervisor of Indochinese Programs
Santa Ana Unified School District
1405 French Street
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Sr. Francesca McGarry
Coordinator Hmong Ministry
Archdiocese of Denver
2161 Tremont Place
Denver, CO 80205

Advisor to Facilitators

Suzy Comerford
Refugee Response Project
Center for Progress of Peoples
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers
48 Princess Margaret Road
Kowloon, Hong Kong

Steering Committee

Marta Brenden
Consultant for Children in Migration
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
122 C Street, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20001

Mr. David Feingold, Director
Institute for the Study of Human Issues
322 S. 16th Street, Suite A
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Sr. Joan Hart
Educational Resources Coordinator
Global Education Office
Catholic Relief Service
253 West 35th Street
New York, NY 10001

Cha Ky
Hmong National Catholic Association
1211 Grand Avenue
Billings, MT 59102

Fr. Thomas Lynch, Pastor
St. James Parish
2110 Main Street
Stratford, CT 06497

Margaret McCallin
ICCB-Geneva
6636 Brawner St.
McLean, VA 22102

Dr. Richard Mollica
Psychiatry Department
Brighton Marine Public Health Center
77 Warren Street
Brighton, MA 02135

Ms. Nancy Schulz
525 W. 235th Street, Apt. 2F
New York, NY 10463

Ms. Lily R. Wu
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
360 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10010

Rev. Peter Zendzian, Director
Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees
U.S. Catholic Conference
1312 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20005

The Bi-Cultural Child

Kim Cook

You try to understand me, but you do not know me well.

The language I know best is not English, and yet English is what you make me speak.

American food and eating habits seem strange to me, and yet you tell me I must try everything and use a fork and spoon.

I don't have many educational toys and little chance to play at home, and yet it seems it is always clean-up time at school.

You tell me to draw a picture of my mother and father, but my family is so many other people, too.

When I am sick, my parents may give me someone else's medicine, but at school you say that is bad.

You want my parents to be involved in my education, but they don't want to interfere.

My family has taught me to respect authority with downcast eyes, and yet you tell me to look at you when you speak to me.

You try to understand me, but you do not know me well.

I have customs and beliefs that I value, and yet you want me to have your customs and beliefs.

When you really understand me and know me well, you will begin to use my cherished customs to help me understand about your cherished customs.